

HAUNTED  
CHURCHES

ELLIOTT  
O'DONNELL

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QUALITY

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by

ELLIOTT O'DONNELL

Author of

"GHOSTS OF LONDON"

"FAMILY GHOSTS"

etc. etc.

The title should be its own recommendation. Those who love ghost stories, and many others who profess to be indifferent, will be eager to read this account of well-known and little-known haunted churches. The author has made a life-long study of his subject and writes with exceptional authority. Just the book for an evening at home.

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BY

ELLIOTT O'DONNELL

AUTHOR OF  
"GHOSTS OF LONDON" "FAMILY GHOSTS" ETC. ETC.

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## *Haunted Churches*

### CHAPTER I

#### LONDON'S HAUNTED CHURCHES

SOME years ago my interest was aroused by an article in the *Daily Express* relating to ghostly happenings in St. Bartholomew-the-Great.<sup>1</sup> According to this article, the Rector, the Rev. W. Sandwith, stated that one week-day night he saw a strange man in the church, which was in semi-darkness, save for a light in the sacristy and near the vestry. The man was looking down the church, and the light was behind him. The Rector asked him if he could be of any assistance to him, whereupon the man, without replying, walked towards the Lady chapel. Mr. Sandwith followed him, and, when only a few feet away from him, saw him suddenly and inexplicably disappear. Also, according to this article, the Rector, when kneeling by the altar at midday celebration, saw close to him a man's face looking upturned, as if at the cross on the altar. There was something strangely arrestive about the face, the features of which bore a striking resemblance to those of the Duke of Argyll, when Marquis of Lorne, and as the Rector stared at it in wonder, it gradually faded away.

But apparently Mr. Sandwith, during his

<sup>1</sup> 15th March 1921.

ministry, was not the only person to witness ghostly phenomena in the church, for he is reported to have said that, on one occasion, his wife saw a phantom monk, whose features were partly hidden by a cowl, standing at the altar rails, and several members of the congregation saw weird and ghostly sights in the church, too. It was mainly due to this article that I went, some years later, to St. Bartholomew's in Smithfield and heard from someone, at that time connected with the church, another strange story. He said that once, when he was alone in the church, early in the morning, he saw a luminous white something in the centre aisle. Fascinated by it, he was staring at it, wondering what on earth it could be, when, suddenly, it took the form of a woman in a nightdress, and he realised it was an exact image of his daughter, who had been in Australia for some years. There was joyful recognition in its eyes as they met his, and then, quite as suddenly and mysteriously as it had appeared, it vanished, leaving him greatly upset, for he believed that he had seen the spirit of his daughter, and that she was dead. However, happily for him, he was mistaken. In a letter, which he received subsequently, he was told that she had been dangerously ill, but was now recovering, and later she wrote to him herself, telling him that, when her illness had reached a climax and her life was hanging in the balance, she had had a strange dream. She dreamed she was standing in St. Bartholomew's church, looking at him. She awoke, trembling with the happiness of having seen him, and from that moment started getting better. The dream she had was so vivid and natural that, greatly impressed by it, she made a note of the exact

hour and date on which it had occurred. Now, as my informant had likewise noted the exact date and time of his daughter's apparition appearing to him, and had found that both date and time corresponded exactly with the date and time of her dream, I think we might conclude that the case was unquestionably one of Projection.

This same person also told me that, not infrequently, when he was alone in the church, he heard footsteps following him, sometimes in the centre aisle, but more often in the ambulatories.

The church is traditionally said to be haunted by the ghost of the founder, Rayer, or Rahere, who lived in the reign of Henry I and, although jester to His Majesty, was noted for his piety. If there is any truth in the tradition, though goodness, or perhaps badness, alone knows why so religious a man as Rayer was supposed to be should be earth-bound, then the mysterious footsteps, still heard at times in the ambulatories, may reasonably be those of his spirit.

In March 1849, during excavations in Smithfield Market, necessary for the making of a sewer, a number of unhewn stones, blackened as if by fire and covered with many much charred human bones, were discovered several feet below the surface, and in a spot directly fronting the entrance to St. Bartholomew-the-Great. Several oak posts, also charred by fire, with staples and rings attached to them were found too. Since the spot was believed to have been the one where the victims of the Marian persecutions were burned, the significance of the bones and posts was beyond question. The martyrs of those hideous cruelties, which will ever damn the reign of the

bigot queen, were roasted to death with their faces turned to the East and to the great gate of the church, where the Prior stood, watching their frightful sufferings and, no doubt, praying piously.

It was after these discoveries that people passing the spot at night, or when alone in certain of the ambulatories, spoke of hearing harrowing, ghostly sounds, such as moans and groans, and occasionally blood-curdling shrieks. These sounds are rumoured still to continue periodically.

I have paid several visits to the church, and on one occasion, I fancied, I saw a shadowy figure slip past me as I was walking along the aisle connecting the two ambulatories and into which the main entrance to the church leads. It was afternoon, in between lights, and the building was full of shadows cast by the waning sun, but this shadow moved, and it was neither mine nor of any of the material objects round me. It suggested a monk but I heard no accompanying footsteps. It went by me noiselessly and with a suggestion of stealth. The same individual who told me about the phantom light in the centre aisle, also told me several people had told him they had seen an indescribably horrible shape gliding along one of the ambulatories. It startled a former curate to such a degree that he fainted and was ill for a long time afterwards.

Another ancient church that is reputed haunted is the Grey Friars in Newgate Street. One of the ghosts is that of Queen Isabella, the cruel wife of Edward II, styled by her contemporaries "La Belle" and "The She-Wolf of France."

To quote Mr. Walter Thornbury :<sup>1</sup> "As if to

<sup>1</sup> See *Old and New London*, vol. ii. p. 365.

propagate an eternal lie, she was buried with the heart of her murdered husband on her breast."

There was no true "Blue," in the days when the Bluecoat School was in the City, who did not believe in the haunting of the Greyfriars' churchyard by the earth-bound spirit of the Bad Isabella.

Another ghost said still, at times, to haunt Greyfriars is that of a Hungerford. According to Walter Thornbury, she was Lady Alice Hungerford, but John Tombs<sup>1</sup> states this is erroneous and that she was Agnes, the second wife of Sir Edward Hungerford, for poisoning whom she was tried, found guilty and hanged at Tyburn in 1523.

If her husband treated her as shamefully as his son, Lord Hungerford of Haytesbury, is said to have treated his three wives, then he deserved to be poisoned. Tradition says Agnes was very beautiful, and there is an amusing story to the effect that on one occasion when the ghosts of La Belle Isabella and Agnes Hungerford chanced to meet in the churchyard of the Greyfriars they were so jealous of one another that they began a furious scrap, to the terror of the material spectator, a night-watchman, who promptly took to his heels.

Considering its comparative modernity one would hardly suspect St. Thomas's church, Regent Street, of harbouring anything in the nature of a ghost, and yet at one time, according to information supplied by *The Daily Chronicle* in 1921, it was undoubtedly haunted.

According to that paper, the Rev. Clarence May, an assistant priest at St. Thomas's, on entering the church one morning, to say Mass, saw a man in a

<sup>1</sup> See *Ancestral Families*.

black cassock, apparently a priest, kneeling before the altar. Thinking that he might be a priest formerly associated with the church, Mr. May was not particularly surprised. Presently the kneeling man rose, left the church and, passing in front of the high altar, disappeared from view. Supposing that the stranger had gone to the sacristy, Mr. May, upon reaching it himself directly afterwards, was astonished to find that he was not there. The door was locked, as usual, and the key hidden in its customary place, but of the strange priest there was not a sign. It then struck Mr. May that although his own footsteps on the floor of the chancel were distinctly audible, the stranger's made no sound whatever ; and this peculiarity, in conjunction with the stranger's quite inexplicable disappearance, caused Mr. May to realise that what he had just witnessed was a super-physical phenomenon. Apparently, Mr. May was never able to ascertain the identity of the phantom, though, from what he was told, he concluded that it was most probably the spirit of a former rector who had died some twenty years previously. He did ascertain, on reliable authority, that at least three times within the past twenty years a phantom priest had been seen in the church. Therefore, it is fairly evident that St. Thomas's in Regent Street is, at any rate, periodically haunted.

Reverting to old religious buildings, the church of St. Peter ad Vincula, near the north-west of the White Tower of the Tower of London, is, at times, haunted by a phantom procession. Quoting from a work, the authority of which is guaranteed by the editor, an Oxford graduate,<sup>1</sup> the author says :

<sup>1</sup> See *Ghostly Visitors*, by "Spectre Stricken."

An old friend of mine, Capt. —— of the —— regiment, was one evening going the rounds with the sentry, when he saw a light burning in the chapel. He pointed it out to the sentry and asked what it meant.

'I don't know what it means, sir,' was the reply, 'but I have often seen that and stranger things here of nights.'

Again and again my friend looked at the window, and each time the light gleamed through the darkness. Determined to ascertain the cause, Capt. —— procured a ladder, placed it against the chapel wall, mounted it and gazed in on a scene that thrilled his every nerve. Slowly down the aisle moved a stately procession of knights and ladies, attired in ancient costumes ; and in front walked an elegant female, whose face was averted from him, but whose figure greatly resembled the one he had seen in reputed portraits of Anne Boleyn. After having repeatedly paced the chapel, the entire procession, together with the light, disappeared.

So deeply was my friend impressed with the seeming reality of the scene, that not till then did he discover he had been gazing in on a phantom crowd.

Capt. —— was evidently made of sterner stuff than the sentries who have seen a ghost, also believed to be that of the same Anne, outside the White Tower, and been very badly scared.

Perhaps, however, the sentries have had more reason to have been frightened, because the ghost they have seen has generally been headless. The latest published account of its appearance was three or four years ago. The sentry who was doing night duty outside the White Tower suddenly became aware of a white figure that seemed to rise from nowhere and was coming in his direction. As it drew nearer he perceived it was a woman clad in white. He could not see her face owing, so he thought, to the gloom. Wondering who she could be to be out so late—it was past midnight—he called out "Who goes there ?" There was no reply, and no other sounds

save the tap, tapping of her high heels, which rang out with remarkable clearness amid the sepulchral silence of the Tower. On she came, and he was debating what to do next, for he had never had to challenge a woman, when she emerged from the gloom and came into bright moonlight. He then received a shock, for the figure he had taken to be a woman had no head. He could have faced one of his country's enemies or any human being, but to face a thing that looked like a woman and was only part of one, that could walk and yet had no head, was asking altogether too much of him, and, panic-stricken, he fled. For a sentry to desert his post is a serious offence, but as he was by no means the first sentry who had been badly scared when doing duty at that particular spot, the authorities were lenient, and he got off with a reprimand. As a matter of fact, the same apparition has repeatedly appeared to sentries at the Tower.

The spot from which it always seems to rise, and which is nearly opposite the door of St. Peter's church, is where Anne Boleyn, Lady Jane Grey and Essex were all beheaded. Small wonder is it, therefore, that it is haunted. On one occasion, when a sentry was too scared even to run, he saw the phantom pass into the church *through the closed door*.

And here is another ghostly incident relating to closed doors.

All sorts of rumours have been current regarding ghostly happenings in Westminster Abbey, but I have not been able to get any really authentic information on the subject. One story that created some sensation a few years ago was as follows : A policeman on duty outside the Abbey, late one

autumn night, saw a man in ecclesiastical robes approaching him at a rapid pace. Supposing a service of some kind was to be held in the Abbey he did not pay any particular attention to the man, until the latter, hurrying right up to the building, passed into it through the closed doors. The policeman was impressed then, and very much so. He rubbed his eyes vigorously and blinked, to make sure he had seen aright and was not dreaming. He was still staring at the entrance to the Abbey when he felt a gentle tap on his shoulder. He swung round, no one was near him, but coming towards him, through the slight mist, was a procession of black-clad figures, walking in twos. They were all men, their heads were bowed, their hands clasped in front of them as if in prayer, and their feet made no noise. On they came, right by the policeman, who gazed at them in open-mouthed awe and astonishment, and, like the figure that had preceded them, they passed through the tightly-shut doors into the great building. The policeman was a sturdy Midlander, and, like the majority of yokels born and bred in Northamptonshire, without an atom of imagination in his constitution. He had hitherto treated any reference to ghosts with supreme contempt, but his scepticism was now rudely shaken. Could anything but a ghost pass through a closed door ? He went up to the building and listened, and, lo and behold, from its interior came the sound of very sweet and plaintive music. Another sound that was not so sweet was the voice of his sergeant who asked him what the something-something he was doing, standing there with his ear to the door ; did he think he heard burglars ?

Not wishing to experience the sergeant's sarcasm—the sergeant could be very acrid and often was—he refrained from mentioning the music and procession and merely said : " I thought I heard a noise but I daresay it was only fancy." The sergeant put his ear to the door. " No, all still," he exclaimed, " not the slightest sound. You've noises on the brain. No one would ever think of burgling the Abbey ; what would they find, if they did ? " And that ended that. The Northamptonshire lad never saw the procession again, nor heard the sweet and plaintive music, though he often thought of both.

John Hatfield, who died at his home in Glasshouse Yard, Aldersgate, in 1770, at the age of 102, had a very narrow escape of his life, which escape he always believed he owed to superphysical agency, using as its medium " Tom," the great clock at Westminster. The incident occurred, when he was a soldier, in the reign of William III. He was tried at Windsor by a court-martial on a charge of having fallen asleep while on duty at Windsor Castle. He emphatically denied the charge and, to quote from the *Book of Days*,<sup>1</sup> declared, as a proof of his having been awake at the time, that he heard " Tom " strike 13, the truth of which was doubted by the Court because of the great distance. But while he was under sentence of death, an affidavit was made by several persons that the clock actually did strike 13 instead of 12, wherefore he received the king's pardon. The incident, we are told, was engraved, presumably in brief, on his coffin. " Tom " had long been popularly believed to be haunted and when, some time after the trial of Hatfield, it was removed

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. p. 3.

to St. Paul's, the belief persisted. Among other tales and superstitions regarding it is one relating to Royalty. It is said that whenever a very important member of the royal family is about to die, " Tom " invariably strikes out of order.

## CHAPTER II

## HAUNTED CHURCHES NEAR LONDON

THE Deanery at Windsor Castle possesses a very well authenticated ghost. It is frequently heard walking along a passage, opening a door and descending four stairs, with three distinct steps. A lady, who visited the Deanery comparatively recently and heard nothing of the ghost, told the occupants of the house that the passage was haunted by a figure in grey, too vague and shadowy, however, for her to determine whether it was the phantom of a man or woman.

The cloisters adjoining the Deanery are believed to be haunted, and by a ghost bearing a striking resemblance to the portrait of Henry VIII in the National Portrait Gallery. It is occasionally seen but more often heard perambulating the Dean and Canon's cloisters, groaning and moaning, as if in direst anguish. If it really is the earth-bound spirit of Henry VIII one cannot be surprised, or help being somewhat satisfied, that such a monster as the Bluff Monarch should be doomed to some kind of lasting punishment for his many cruelties.

The churchyard of South Mimms is well known to be haunted by a woman in white, the ghost of a lady who was murdered in the adjoining vicarage by some of the most ruffianly soldiers of Cromwell's army. It seems that sometimes this "woman in white" haunts the vicarage, too.

Some years ago I interviewed the then vicar of South Mimms, who told me that, although he had never actually seen the ghost, he had been definitely conscious of its near proximity, especially in the early hours of the morning. He was sure it was beneficent and not evil. He told the same story to a representative of *The Daily Chronicle*, whose account of it was published in a subsequent issue of the paper.

Apparently, he also told this reporter that one of his parishioners, on entering the church alone one day, saw a clergyman kneeling at the priest's stall in the chancel. She did not notice anything unusual about him at first, but when he got up and passed through a closed door leading to the vestry, she at once realised that he was not a material being but a ghost.

The description she gave of him exactly fitted a former vicar of the church whom she had never met, and it transpired that on the same day and just about the same hour that she had seen the ghost the former vicar had died.

The vicar of South Mimms also told me he had once seen something of a ghostly nature at the Wash, a strip of waste land, a few minutes walk from the church, running alongside the high road between South Mimms and London, adding that not only he but other people had seen it too. From other sources I learned that, in addition to this ghostly something seen there, the Wash and its environments, including the South Mimms churchyard, are reputed to be at times haunted by the ghost of the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin. He used to sally forth from the Wash to hold up travellers on the old North Road, which, in his day, was the great highway to

the North. It was hearing these stories about the hauntings of the churchyard and Wash that led me to spend an all-night vigil at South Mimms, in the hope of witnessing some of the phenomena.

The South Mimms church clock was solemnly booming midnight when I arrived at the churchyard, and as I passed by the railings that skirt it, I was conscious of something coming through them and moving along beside me. My own shadow stood out clear and black on the moonlit soil, but only mine ; whatever was with me cast no shadow. I went by the Middlesex Arms and turned down the asphalted lane leading to the South Mimms Wash, and all the way I felt my silent, invisible companion was with me. After leaving, on my right, a quaint little farmhouse, outside which, in the daytime, horses graze, ducks waddle and geese cackle, I found myself alongside a track of waste land, through which a stream rather sluggishly made its winding way.

On the far side of the waste land were hedges and, beyond, fields. On all sides isolated trees stood out against the moonlit background of sky. This was the Wash—a rural spot, despite its proximity to a great artery of London. Continuing along the deserted, moonlit lane, I crossed a stone bridge and came within sight of a very rustic wooden bridge, with dense foliage on one side of it and wire fencing, bordering fields, on the other side. Here I halted, and standing on the bridge rested against one of its railings.

Old times came vividly back to me. Once again I was a private in the "United Arts" doing sentry duty, by night, on Grosvenor Railway Bridge during the War, and I thought, with longing, of the hot

coffee and bacon with which we used to regale ourselves in the guard-room. I thought, too, of some things not quite so pleasant, of the White Lady ghost rumoured to walk about at night in the South Mimms churchyard, and wondered if she was the silent, invisible companion I sensed was still close to me ; my thoughts reverted, also, to Gill Hill, the scene of the horrible Weare murder, and said to be still haunted by the ghosts of Weare and his murderers, Thurtell and Probert ; to Cheshunt's old manor house, wherein Mrs. Chapman, whose husband, the well-known publisher and brother-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean, had so many harrowing ghostly experiences ; and to Enfield, with its House of Sighs and clang ing armour ghost, popularly believed to be that of one of the De Mandevilles.

Some of these places were not very near, it is true, but as distance counts for little with denizens of the other world, they were near enough not to be pleasant.

A chilliness in the air made me put on my over-coat and, as I did so, I was suddenly conscious that my companion from the churchyard was no longer with me. I was now alone. Every now and then from the high-road and roads more distant came the sound of traffic—hootings, whistlings, rumblings. Occasionally bats skimmed in noiseless flight in and out of trees and bushes, night birds wailed and dogs bayed the moon.

In the shallow water beneath me tiny dark forms darted hither and thither. Every now and then, too, some small animal, maybe a stoat or rat, rustled through the reeds and long grass. Otherwise stillness, and not a human being in sight anywhere.

To me, there is always a something rather eerie in a deserted, moonlit road or lane, and as I gazed at the whitened empty lane confronting me, and at the shadows of the trees that flecked it here and there, I was conscious of an intense concentration all around me.

I felt all Nature was expecting something to happen, and that very shortly something alarming would burst into view. Then, suddenly, the horses and cattle, which had been standing dumb and motionless in the distant fields, began to race about madly, as if panicked. Birds from the foliage near me flew away with startled cries and much rustling of wings.

I looked round apprehensively and saw hovering over a spot by the roadside a swarm of flies, that, in the uncertain light, looked curiously black and large, and nasty. When I approached them, to see what the attraction was, they mysteriously disappeared, to reappear directly I moved away.

So far as I could see there was nothing to account for their presence. A feeling of intense repulsion and not a little horror seizing me I left the spot hurriedly and retraced my steps to the distant stone bridge.

I was within a few yards of it, when I saw, coming towards me, over the moon-whitened soil, a black shadow, a shadow something like that of a man but not altogether like, and something like that of an animal but, again, not altogether like. A very alarming shadow, because it was so ultra-grotesque and frightfully suggestive of evil. I glanced around to discover its origin, and failed, utterly.

It was not due to a cloud, because no clouds

were in the sky. There were trees near the lane, and their shadows certainly did sway to and fro in the night breeze, but they did not move along as did this shadow. There was no apparent physical counterpart to it, and a very unpleasant atmosphere accompanied it. When it was close to me I experienced again the feeling of horror that had gripped me at the fly-ridden spot, and I walked back in the direction of the wooden bridge. Instinctively, I knew I was being followed by the Shadow, and every time I looked round, there it was, a few yards in my rear. No matter how fast I walked, and, at times, I almost ran, it maintained the same distance from me, seemingly without increasing its pace. When I was close to the wooden bridge, I saw the flies ; they were still hovering round the same spot, and, again, a feeling of intense horror and repulsion obsessed me. I felt the spot was accursed, and something foul and strangely horrible was lying there.

I walked quickly on, and then looked round. The Shadow had come to a halt at the spot around which the flies hovered, and as I gazed at both, Shadow and flies, I was conscious of a shuddering sound, as of suppressed dread, close beside me. The next moment Shadow and flies abruptly vanished, and all I saw at that spot was just moonlight and whitened soil. Directly this happened I felt my invisible companion had rejoined me, and this feeling continued till we came to the churchyard, when I, as suddenly, sensed that the unseen presence had gone and that I was now quite alone.

I have found that many people are most reluctant to talk of ghosts that haunt the town, village or neighbourhood in which they live ; and I attribute

their reluctance chiefly to a fear of ridicule. They still cling, perhaps, to the notion, at one time very prevalent, that it is only rustics and ignorant peasants who believe in ghosts. However, that notion no longer prevails. On the contrary, the reverse would seem to hold good, and to-day, speaking generally, it is the more highly educated people, who, far from scoffing at those who believe in psychic phenomena, take their belief seriously, even if they cannot agree with it. As a rule it is now only the uneducated or hopelessly ignorant person who laughs derisively when one speaks of the superphysical.

I certainly found the rustics at South Mimms very reluctant to tell me anything about the Wash, and it was not until I had approached and sounded a dozen or more of them that I at last met an old roadman who was not afraid to talk. "You didn't see the ghost of Dick Turpin," he remarked, when I told him the primary reason for my all-night vigil at the Wash. "Nobody I've come across ever has seen him, but those flies and that shadow you speak of, they're different."

He then went on to tell me that his father, who had been dead many years, used to talk about getting "a queer feeling" every time he passed the churchyard at night, as if the spirits of some of those who lay buried there were standing at the railings peering at him, and of being occasionally followed by one or more of them, always in the direction of the Wash. His father, also, used to speak about an old woman living near the Wash when he was a boy, who, it was said, called up evil spirits. She was found dead one morning at the Wash. Some thought she had been murdered, but there was nothing to

prove it. Anyway, being a witch, the parson wouldn't have her buried in the churchyard, and so she was buried at the cross-roads, near the Wash, with a stake driven through her body, to keep her spirit from wandering about. "In spite of these precautions," the old roadman continued, "people said they saw a shadow, just as you described, following them along the road leading to the Wash, at night. Some thought it was the spirit of the old witch, and others one of her imps, but whichever or whatever it was, it always came to a stop at the spot where the body of the old woman was found. And folks declared, too, that at this spot, as if waiting for the Shadow, were a swarm of nasty-looking black flies that disappeared, suddenly, with the Shadow, in the mysterious manner you described. But," he added, "it doesn't happen every night, only just now and then." He went on to tell me about some experiences he had in South Mimms churchyard. He said that some time after one of the very old tombs had undergone repairs and renovations he had seen a gruesome leadenish blue light hovering around the spot, and nothing would induce his dog to go near it. When, however, the light no longer appeared there, his dog would approach the tomb quite happily.

I published an account of my nocturnal experiences at South Mimms in *The Sunday Pictorial* and received a letter from a reader, living in a suburb of Birmingham, expressing great interest in my narrative and stating that he, also, had had a ghostly experience at the Wash. The following is an *ad verbum* extract from his letter : "Nearly fifty years ago (I was then between thirteen and fourteen years of age) I was staying with an uncle at High

Barnet, together with a cousin, a little older than myself. He and I were great chums, certainly not good boys, in fact we were known as two little devils who would come to a bad end, always in some scrape or other, and without fear of anything. My uncle's business took him driving into the surrounding country, and we would often walk a few miles out to meet him, and to get a ride home. One evening we walked to a place called South Mimms. Uncle had not yet arrived, and we proceeded to have a ramble round. It was a late autumn evening, and as we walked along, with the flies surrounding us, there was certainly nothing to worry us, or to give warning of the few minutes of really terrifying experience we were to go through. First, the feeling that everything around us stood still, a feeling that something was happening near us that we could not see. I remember we both stood still, neither speaking, the cold feeling of my hair literally standing on end, just two boys spellbound. Then, the horror of something weird and unearthly that appeared to rise from the very ground, and still no sound at all, just dead silence, as this thing which was neither human nor animal, seemed to come towards us. Suddenly, one of us let out a scream (we were never able to decide which of us it was) which brought us to life, and we ran home, forgetting all about our ride, in our haste to get there, we were so scared ; but we got no sympathy, only each a good hiding, for letting our imaginations run away with us. It was, however, no imagination, it was true and terrifying, but very hard for two young boys to get anyone to believe."

Apart from the tradition concerning the

mysterious death of the reputed witch, in more recent years there have been at least two sinister mysteries that might well be productive of hauntings. The first occurred in 1861<sup>1</sup> when the body of an unknown woman was found in a ditch in a field near the Wash. She was thought to have been employed hay-making by a local farmer, but her face was too gnawn by rats and other vermin for identification to be possible. Cries had been heard coming from the field one night, but whether they were her cries or not was never known. An open verdict was returned. The second mystery occurred in 1930,<sup>2</sup> when the body of an old tramp was found, also in a field, near the Wash. Though a verdict of death from natural causes was returned, there was grave suspicion of foul play. After this second mystery tramps gave the Wash a very wide berth, at night, for some considerable time.

Only a few weeks ago I commented on this to a tramp whom I saw one morning lying on the ground, near the wooden bridge, and he said : "I'll never sleep out 'ere again, guovernor. What with the queer noises from that bit of swampy ground, with its weeds and water, and the things I didn't see but could feel a'overing over and around me all the time, it's far too uncanny for my liking. Talk about 'aunted places. This place is 'aunted right enough, and so is the churchyard near 'ere. I tried sleeping there one night, a year or two ago, but never again, guovernor, not if I knows it."

<sup>1</sup> See *News of the World*, 10th March 1861.

<sup>2</sup> *Sunday Express*, 14th Sept. 1930.

## CHAPTER III

HAUNTED CHURCHES NEAR LONDON  
(continued)

A FEW miles from Hitchin, in a wood on the summit of a hill, are the ruins of Minsden church, at one time a chapel of ease, said to have given shelter to many a passing pilgrim.

Tradition associates it with Alice Perrers, mistress of Edward III and Lady of Hitchin Manor, who is credited with stealing her royal lover's rings when he was on his death-bed and powerless to prevent her. In the seventeenth century it witnessed the marriage of Sir John Barrington, Bart., to Susan Draper.

After that time nothing of any note seems to have happened there, and, about 1738, it became so dilapidated that pieces of masonry and plaster not infrequently fell on the clergy and congregation, to the consternation of both.

Probably, soon after that date it was abandoned, some say on account of widespread rumours of its being haunted by the ghost of a nun, alleged to have been murdered during the reign of Henry VIII, when a convent was either attached to the church or occupied its site.

I first heard of the reputed haunting through a photographer living in the neighbourhood of Minsden, who sent me a photograph taken, he said, in broad daylight at the ruins. The chief interest in the

photograph lay in what resembled the shadowy form of a nun. The photographer did not claim he had photographed a ghost, he merely called my attention to the shadowy form and implied he could not account for it. He referred to a local belief in the haunting of the spot by the phantom of a murdered nun, and suggested that we should visit the ruins ; he would ask a few of his friends to accompany us and I could invite a few of mine. It was October, and, at my suggestion, we chose for the date of our visit to the ruins All Hallows E'en, that being one of the nights in the year when denizens of the spirit world are popularly believed to be in closest touch with the material inhabitants of this plane. Also, since All Hallows E'en is one of the occasions when the working of certain spells is deemed likely to produce interesting results, I asked a lady, who is well versed in such things, to be one of the party. Others I invited were H. V. Morton, the well-known author, Wyndham Lewis, " Beachcomber," and R. Blumenthal, son of the Editor of *The Daily Express*. When I arrived at King's Cross I saw a crowd of people collected in front of the Ladies' Waiting Room. Intuition warned me of the reason, and when I cautiously elbowed my way through the gaping throng, I perceived, as I had anticipated, my mediumistic friend, clad—and this I had not anticipated—in orthodox witch's costume, namely, high cap, cloak, gown covered with demons and black cats and, of course, in one hand, a broomstick. The picture was startling enough, and the expressions on the faces of the spectators were a study. While some showed wonder and others amusement, a few looked positively scared ; probably they thought she

was the escaped inmate of some home for the mentally defective.

Of my three friends, Morton, Wyndham Lewis and Blumenfelt there was not a sign. Indeed, I did not see them till I had bundled the witch into a third-class compartment, much to the consternation of a female occupant, who at once flew out of it. I then caught sight of them stealing surreptitiously into a first-class compartment, as far away from us as possible.

The Hitchin photographer lived with two very proper, elderly female relatives, and when they caught sight of the witch, standing beside me in the doorway, they were immeasurably shocked. "Who is this person?" they demanded. "She must not enter this house." And when I endeavoured to explain why she had come, their indignation grew. "Tom," one of them exclaimed, turning to the photographer, who cowered against the wall, looking extremely sheepish and uncomfortable, "Tom, you never told us a person dressed like this was coming. It's a scandal. What would your dear father, aye, and grandfather say? Why, they never missed a Sunday at chapel in their lives. The mere thought of a woman in such an attire as this," pointing at the witch, who maintained an imperturbability that suggested she was not altogether unaccustomed to such harangues, "coming to the house is enough to make them turn in their graves. Tell her to go away at once." Tom making no response, I had to intervene, and after much pleading obtained permission for the witch to sit with us in Tom's studio till it was time for us to go to the haunted ruins, on the condition, however, that, after leaving the house then, she was never to set foot in it again.

The ruins were several miles distant, and it was well-nigh midnight when we arrived there. As we drew near to the wood, there was a ghostly rustling of leaves, which made the more nervous of the party clutch hold of one another, followed by a buzzing and whirling, as a number of birds, scared at our approach, left their homes in the ivy-clad ruins of the church and flew frantically away.

I had brought with me a variety of articles necessary for the working of the spells, and I proposed that, while the witch muttered appropriate incantations, Messrs. Morton, Wyndham Lewis and Blumenfelt should try their luck with hempseed and apples.

Most All Hallow E'en keepers know the hempseed spell. Walking alone in the dark one has to scatter hempseed over the left shoulder, drawing mould over it afterwards with a hoe or other instrument, and repeating, as one does so, these words :

Hempseed I sow, yes, hempseed I hoe ;  
Oh, those who's to meet me come after me and mow.

And then, if the Powers that govern the Unknown ordain it, one hears footsteps in one's rear and, on turning fearfully around, sees the immaterial counterpart of whoever is to come into one's life within the next twelve months and affect it most. If you are destined to die during that period, you see a skeleton. All this may sound just fanciful and old world, superstitious tripe : but, nevertheless, I have known occasions when something quite unexpected and unquestionably superphysical has happened. On this particular occasion, when asked if they would separate and, alone, amid the gloom and shadows of the trees,

put the spell to the test, Messrs. Morton, Wyndham Lewis and Blumenfelt answered in the negative, a very decided negative ; they much preferred remaining together. The witch did her best to persuade the ghost to manifest itself. Seated on the damp soil she crooned, and incanted, and moaned, there was a note of occasional real misery in the last ; but the other world remained obdurate, it would not come at her calling, and perhaps it was just as well, because some of the party might, I think, have been more than a wee bit startled ; at least I gathered so from their close proximity to one another and from what, every now and then, sounded suspiciously like the chattering of teeth, though the cold—and out there it was cold—might have had something to do with the last.

Our pulses gave a sudden jump when one of the party exclaimed : "What's that ?" We looked, and for a few seconds I thought that the witch's endeavours had at last succeeded in bringing the superphysical, but investigation proved it was only the ghostly effect of the moonlight on one of the ivy-clad ruin arches. We were discussing our disappointment, "professed" disappointment, I fancy, on the part of several, when from afar came a sound like the report of a firearm. "A strange hour and season for anyone to be out shooting," someone observed, and we thought no more about it.

As it was now about four o'clock, the chance of the ghost appearing seemed so remote that we set out on our homeward journey.

And now came our only real thrill. It was a still, grey, chilly morning. There had been a slight fog rising from the damp ground during the night,

and it was now so thick that those of our party who were in front, myself among them, could not see the witch and photographer, who were trudging along some little distance in the rear. Through the mist the black shades of trees and hedges stood out faintly. We were hastening, thinking longingly of breakfast and a cheery fire, when suddenly dark figures sprang out from seemingly nowhere, and peremptory tones commanded us to halt. They were policemen, four of them, who in the mist—my eyes, no doubt, were strained by hours of high nerve tension vigil—appeared magnified into giants. They asked what we were doing, tramping a lonely highway at that unearthly hour, and when I said : "Looking for a ghost," the leader of them responded nastily : "That's a good 'un. You don't expect us to swallow that." He went on to inform us that the booking office at Wellyn railway station had been broken into during the night and the official in charge of it fired at, which explained the report of firearms we had heard.

He was about to search us, and I was feeling somewhat anxious, because one of our party had, I knew, a revolver on him, when I was seized with a sudden inspiration. "Do you know Mr. —?" I said, naming the local photographer.

"Very well," the Sergeant replied, "but he's not here."

"No," I answered, "but he's following with a lady, clad as a witch, and one or two other people. Do you not know last night was All Hallow's E'en, when the dead from cross-roads and cemeteries are permitted to mingle once more with the living ? We came hoping to see the ghost of the nun that

rumour alleges haunts the ruins of Minsden church. Haven't you heard of her?"

"Now I come to think of it," the Sergeant said, "I 'ave 'card of the party, but I don't pay any attention to tales of that sort. You'll all 'ave to come along to the Police Station and answer such questions as may be put to you."

Grunts and ejaculations of dismay came from Morton, Wyndham Lewis and Blumenfelt, who had hitherto been dumb, too overcome, so I imagined, with the horror of the situation to speak.

Now the appalling thoughts of not getting to their respective newspaper headquarters in time loosened their tongue strings, nor did I feel too happy, for I was cold and shivering and wanted a hot drink very badly.

To my infinite relief, however, at this very critical moment, there loomed into view the witch, photographer and the rest of the party, who were all local. On hearing them corroborate my story, the Police Sergeant capitulated, and all ended well, at least so far as concerned that little incident; but there was some bother when we got back to the photographer's house and tried to smuggle in the witch. One of Tom's elderly relatives hearing us, and making sure we were burglars, or the house was on fire, started to scream, and it took desperate efforts on Tom's part to calm her. Fortunately, she was far too frightened to come out of her bedroom, or she must have seen the witch.

Our train back to London did not arrive for nearly two hours, and all that time we sat huddled together in the dreary room, in momentary dread of one or other of Tom's aged relatives descending on us. To

render the situation more embarrassing and alarming, the witch, doubtless affected by sitting on the cold ground for so long, had to retire with sudden haste to the toilet which, as bad luck would have it, was upstairs, next to one of the aged relative's bedrooms. She contrived to get there without attracting attention but, on leaving the place, in her anxiety to catch the train, she slipped, and descending amid an avalanche of paper parcels, landed on the floor with a terrific crash. This was altogether too much for Messrs. Morton, Wyndham Lewis and Blumenfelt. They decamped pell-mell, meanly leaving me to grab hold of the witch and drag her and her many parcels to the station.

So ended my first visit to the haunted church of Minsden.

I went there twice afterwards and on the last occasion, when I was alone, I heard sounds of very sweet and plaintive music, and thought, just for a moment, I saw a female figure in white standing in one of the archways. It was gone almost at once, and may possibly have been due to a trick of the moonlight.

## CHAPTER IV

HAUNTED CHURCHES NEAR LONDON  
(continued)

ONE of the most remarkable cases of haunting in a church occurred at West Drayton, near Uxbridge, in the middle of the eighteenth century. People visiting the churchyard heard knocking in certain of the vaults under the church. On one occasion, three people from one of the large houses in the village, hearing the sounds, peered through the grating in the side of the foundation of the church and saw a large black bird, resembling a raven, perched on a coffin, pecking it furiously. On their telling the Parish Clerk, he informed them he had often seen that bird in two of the closed vaults. His wife and daughter, who declared they had seen it too, said it usually appeared on a Friday evening.

When the bell-ringers came one day to peal the bells, a boy, who appeared to be very agitated, told them the mysterious black bird was flying about in the chancel.

Four men and two youths at once armed themselves with sticks and stones and, cautiously entering the church, saw the bird fluttering among the rafters. They flung stones at it and drove it from one place to another. Twice they hit it with sticks, so hard that one of its wings drooped as if it was crippled. Finally, under the fusilage of stones and

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blows it fell down wounded, screaming and fluttering, into the eastern part of the church. Two of its assailants immediately drove it into a corner and, with cries of triumph, vaulted over the communion rails to seize it. It sank, apparently exhausted, on to the floor. The two men thrust out their hands to clutch it, and, to the amazement and stupefaction of all present, it vanished ; vanished, suddenly and quite inexplicably, the moment the men's outstretched fingers seemed to close round it. After this it was constantly seen perched on the communion rails, or fluttering violently to and fro in the vaults, and every attempt to touch or catch it always failed.

All sorts of theories were expounded to try and account for the phenomena.

Certain people believed that, some time previously, one person had secretly murdered another and then killed him or herself, and that the assassin and victim had been buried side by side in one of the vaults. Their spirits, being unable to agree, could not lie at rest, hence the disturbances created by the phantom bird, which was supposed to be the earth-bound soul of one of them, probably of the murderer.

Footnotes in *Glimpses in the Twilight*, a work by the Rev. F. G. Lee, D.D., contain interesting references to the haunting.<sup>1</sup>

A Mrs. White, whose family had been residents in West Drayton for about thirty-six years, writing to Dr. Lee, said : "The country folks always believed that the Spectral Bird which haunted Drayton church was the restless and miserable spirit of a murderer who had committed suicide, and who,

<sup>1</sup> *Vide p. 143.*

through family influence, instead of being put into a pit or hole, with a stake through his body, at the cross-road by Harmondsworth, as was the sentence by law, had been buried in consecrated ground at the north side of the churchyard."

This belief in the souls of evil-doers coming back in the guise of birds is very old, and has existed, and still does exist, in many parts of the world.

I came across it in Oregon not only among the Rogue River Indians but among white settlers in the backwoods. When I was in a forest one day my horse shied so suddenly that I was all but unseated. I tried to ascertain the cause but could not. Not a snake or wild animal was to be seen. After fruitless endeavours to persuade my horse to proceed I laid the reins down to see what it would do, and it at once turned and after going back along the track we had been traversing, it took me home by a different route. When I mentioned what had happened to a rancher, who had lived in the forest for many years, he said, "Your horse shied because of a tree that bears a very bad reputation. Several people have been found either hanging on it, or dead under it, and the Indians of the Reservation say it is haunted by a phantom black eagle, which they declare is the earth-bound spirit of a redskin woman who poisoned three of her husbands. Be this as it may no horse will ever pass the tree without shying and evincing symptoms of great terror.

The same belief prevails among Indians in other parts of the State. Not a few churchyards in Germany and other continental countries are reputed to be haunted by ghost birds, supposedly the spirits of people interred there, who cannot rest

because of the wicked lives they led when in material bodies. Nearer home a strange story was told me some years ago of a church, the name of which I have forgotten, between London and Southend, nearer the former than the latter. My informant was a member of the defunct club for Psychical Research in Regent Street. "My brother," she said, "was at one time vicar of, for the sake of convenience I will style it, St. Sepulchre's. Living near the vicarage was a man named Harding who was an atheist, and who took a peculiar delight in arguing with my brother and deriding the divinity of Christ. One day he said to my brother : 'Look here, Vicar, if there is another world and I die before you, I will come back as a bird and let you know where I am. If my feathers are white you will know I am in Paradise enjoying myself, but if they are black you will know I am in the other place having a bad time of it.'

"He laughed, as if it was a good joke, and the more heartily when he saw my brother was shocked. One evening, about a year later, my brother, who had been obliged to take a long holiday owing to ill-health, and had only just returned from it, was alone in the vestry writing notices concerning a parochial meeting on the following day. It was a warm, wet night and the ceaseless pattering of the rain on the slate roof and window was the only sound that interrupted the otherwise utter stillness of the building. Feeling a sudden cold draught my brother rose from his seat to find out where it originated, and, as he did so, he caught sight of two red eyes glaring down at him from one of the rafters. To his amazement it was a black bird,

larger than a raven and belonging to a species with which, in spite of his fondness of natural history, he was quite unfamiliar. As he stared at the bird, it became shadowy and indistinct and grew more and more so till it abruptly vanished altogether. Thinking he must be the victim of some strange hallucination, possibly due to his recent illness, although that illness was in no degree mental, he resumed his seat, but had not been writing long before he heard the flapping of wings and, on turning at once round, he again saw the bird, this time on the floor, by the door. It was looking at him, and there was something peculiarly familiar in its eyes. Suddenly there flashed through his mind the conversation he had with the atheist and those words : ‘ and if my feathers are black you will know I am in the other place, having a bad time of it.’ My brother,’ my lady informant added, ‘ had not heard of the atheist’s death and wondered if it could have occurred during his absence. The feathers of the bird he was staring at were certainly very black and there was something disturbingly unusual and sinister about the creature. Feeling decidedly eerie and uncomfortable my brother exclaimed, ‘ If you are the soul of’—and he mentioned the atheist’s name—‘ I will pray to God to forgive you your sins.’ Crossing himself, he knelt and, with closed eyes, prayed very fervently. When he had finished he glanced round, but the bird was no longer on the floor. It was no longer in the room, and yet the door and windows were shut, and there was no opening through which it could have got away. He still might have attributed it all to his imagination, or to some very remarkable hallucination or illusion, but for what he saw on the floor. There, just where

he had seen his strange visitant, were the unmistakable imprints of the claws of a large bird. On his way to the vicarage, an hour or so afterwards, he met one of his parishioners and asked him about the atheist.

“ ‘ What, didn’t you know ? ’ ” the parishioner ejaculated, looking very astonished, “ ‘ poor ’ —naming the atheist—‘ died a month ago, but, of course, you might not have heard of it, as he never went to church.’

“ My brother,” my lady informant concluded, “ never saw the bird again, but always, after that night, he included the atheist in his prayers.”

There is in Quainton church, Buckinghamshire, a very quaint epitaph to the memory of a member of the ancient family of Dormer. It reads thus : “ The virtuous and religious Susanna, Lady Dormer, who most piously left this transitory life the 24th day of February, Anno Domini 167 $\frac{2}{3}$ .”

And concerning this same Susanna, Lady Dormer, there is the following tradition. After her death her husband, Sir John Dormer, went on a visit to Leghorn in Italy, and, soon after his arrival there, he was harrowed night after night by a vivid dream in which he saw his dead wife floating on water. Every feature of her face, the face he had loved so much, was portrayed with a reality which was ghastly and appalling in the extreme. After going through the nerve-racking ordeal for three or four nights in succession he yielded to a sudden impulse and returned home, in order to see if there was anything wrong with the family vault in Quainton church.

There, in company with the sexton and other local people, he entered the vault and found it

flooded, and the coffin of his wife floating on the water. Greatly impressed and firmly convinced his dream had been sent to him by the Unknown, he had the vault repaired and his wife's coffin replaced in its original position. It is somewhat significant, in view of the dream, that he did not long survive his wife and was buried next to her in the Dormer family vault.

According to Mr. Lipscombe, the Buckinghamshire historian,<sup>1</sup> when the vault was opened, about a hundred years after Sir John Dormer's death, the outer wooden coffin of Susanna, Lady Dormer, was found to be greatly decayed, as though it had been subjected to great damp, while the inner leaden coffin and both coffins of Sir John were found to be intact.

In Mr. Lipscombe's opinion the damp may have been due to the soil, which is of a tenacious clay.

He does not, however, pooh-pooh the pregoing story and catalogue it as a mere fable or legend, but says, "It is wild enough but not altogether improbable." Possibly he was acquainted with the local rumour that strange unaccountable happenings have, from time to time, occurred both in the church itself and in the churchyard.

<sup>1</sup> See *History of Buckinghamshire*.

## CHAPTER V

### HAUNTED MIDLAND CHURCHES

FOUR years ago *The Northampton Press*, which I have always found most kind and courteous, told me of a haunted cemetery, about a mile from Northampton. Some years ago the bodies of six criminals were removed from a burial-place in Northampton and reinterred in this particular cemetery, after which people passing the spot at night spoke of seeing a shadowy form and ghostly lights moving about among the tombstones and in and out the trees and bushes. The *Press* suggested I should accompany them to the cemetery and hold a nocturnal vigil there.

I was living at Gulsborough at the time, and the *Press* very kindly took me from there in their car to the cemetery, where several of their colleagues joined us.

A church stands in the cemetery, which is skirted by iron railings. It was a fine, moonlight night, and a silence, interrupted only by the distant hooting of cars and baying of dogs, reigned everywhere.

"Do you think the night is favourable for ghostly manifestations?" one of the *Press* asked.

"You never can tell," was my cautious response. "In my experience covering many years, psychic phenomena come at any time and season. They are not confined to any particular weather, though they may seem rather more partial to some climatic

conditions than to others. Often they happen at a moment when you are least expecting them, and, contrary to the view of some people, I do not believe they come to order."

As it would have entailed some difficulty to enter the cemetery, we remained outside and peered through the railings.

The tombstones shone a ghostly white in the moonbeams, and the shadows of the trees, sepulchrally black, adopted strange, phantastic forms. Periodically, as I wandered down the narrow path bordering the railings, I thought I saw movement among the tombstones and bushes, but this may only have been my imagination. What was not imagination was the glow which illuminated the church windows and seemed to emanate from within the building. This, however, as one of the Press suggested, might have been produced by the moonlight on the far side of the church.

Nothing deserving of further comment occurred, and, shortly before dawn, we came away disappointed, through not having seen or heard anything that could not be explained on purely physical grounds. Yet, for all that, I believed the place was really haunted because, intermittently, I sensed the close proximity of some unearthly presence.

There is a local tradition that certain of the cemeteries on the site of old Whittlebury Forest are periodically haunted by a phantom horseman and a pack of spectral hounds. According to a well-known legend, a lady of great beauty, the daughter of a nobleman living on the outskirts of Whittlewood, had innumerable lovers, among them a young knight. Leading the knight on to imagine she

favoured him more than anyone else and intended to marry him, she abruptly threw him over for a richer suitor, and when he pleaded with her, she merely mocked him. Driven to despair by her treatment, he committed suicide. She did not survive him long, coming to a sudden mysterious end. It was after her death that the wood began to be haunted. Villagers and others passing by or through it at night were startled at hearing the baying of hounds and the thud of horses' hoofs. Presently, there loomed through the moonbeams and shadows the figures of a white-robed woman, pursued by a rider on a black horse and pack of sable hounds. On the figures came, nearer and nearer to the spectators, who moved out of their course, shaking with terror. And as they drew closer still and came into the path of the moonbeams, the lady was seen to possess extraordinary beauty, while, horrible to relate, her pursuer was headless, his green-clad body ending in a protruding, gory stump.

An icy wind accompanied them as they swept past the spectators, who did not venture to emerge from their hiding-place till they were out of sight. Occasionally only the headless horseman appeared, "riding silently along the grass-grown wayside, beneath the pale glimmer of the stars or the weird shimmer of the moon, and disappearing as soon as seen."

In course of time much of the old forest disappeared, but the haunting continued, and still continues, and people passing by certain cemeteries built on its site at night, have, at times, been terrified at the spectacle of the spectral hunt, or the solitary headless horseman, careering over graves and

tombstones. Sometimes the chase of the fair quarry is not confined to one huntsman, for we are told :<sup>1</sup> " Rangers of ancient date may still be seen in their quaint dresses of Lincoln green dashing across the glades (or what were once glades) on fiery steeds, and cheering their hell hounds with unearthly glee."

Not far from one of the present-day cemeteries, and traditionally said to be built on the site of a very ancient place of worship, is the "Briary," a rather quaint little house, standing in its own ground.

Having heard from the two ladies who occupied it that it was haunted by a ghost, whom they styled "Sir Richard," and by various other phenomena, *The Northampton Press* asked me to join them in an all-night vigil there. They chose for the occasion a Thursday evening in September. The weather was uncertain. A strong wind moaned and wailed through trees and around house-tops, and dark clouds scurrying across the sky periodically obscured the moon.

A few minutes after my arrival at the place, while our hostesses, in their picturesque, old-world drawing-room, stood chatting with my Press companions, I suddenly got a very strong impression of pillars and arches. I seemed to be surrounded by them, and then came an equally strong impression of stags and oak trees. I did not know that an ancient church and forest were said to have once occupied the site of the Briary. It was only when I mentioned my impressions to our hostesses that I learned it for the first time.

We held our vigil in the room where "Sir Richard" was stated to have most often appeared.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Historical Legends of Northamptonshire*, by Alfred T. Story.

We sat in darkness, in no particular formation, occasionally talking but more often silent. Suddenly I became conscious of a curious, subtle change in the atmosphere, a new element seemed to have entered and intermingled with it. An element that conjured up visions of monks, sombre processions and incense. Abruptly, another change, and the ecclesiastical gave place to the phantastic. I felt there was with us something of the semi-human, semi-animal species, something associated with the bizarre in trees and forests. At my request one of our party had brought a dog with him, as I have found dogs to be sure "psychic barometers," invariably exhibiting symptoms of fear and unrest prior to the advent of any superphysical manifestation. Hitherto the dog had been quiet, but it now began to move about and, presently, to whine and then to bark, and through a window overlooking the front garden, facing me, I saw a leadenish blue glow or light. It lasted only a few seconds and then gradually faded away. Other members of the party saw luminary phenomena too, but through a glass door leading to another part of the house. Some of these lights were in the form of a cross and others in the form of a triangle. When all these lights had vanished our hostesses suggested we should break off for a while and have some refreshments.

While we were consuming the very welcome and excellent coffee and sandwiches so thoughtfully provided for us, we discussed our vigil and came to the conclusion that nearly everyone present had experienced something that savoured of the psychic and which could not satisfactorily be accounted for on purely physical grounds.

The interval for refreshments ended, we resumed our sitting in the dark. For some considerable time nothing happened ; then the dog began to bark again, and from afar came the sound of hoofs, galloping hoofs. Nearer and nearer they came, until I not only heard the Thing that made them enter the room and pass through our midst, accompanied by a blast of cold air, but I was conscious of a horsey atmosphere. Soon after the sounds had died away in the distance, I heard ghostly mutterings, as of far away voices saying prayers, and again came the impression of arches, pillars and gloomy ambulatories ; and at the cessation of these impressions our vigil ended.

A church, no longer in existence, that, according to tradition, was once haunted by at least two ghosts, was St. Peter's, Rushton, and associated with it is the following tragic story : In 1619 the Rushton estate, hitherto the property of the ill-fated Tresham family, passed into the hands of Sir William Cokayne, Lord Mayor of London, whose son, Charles, was created Viscount Cullen. Viscount Cullen's heir, Bryan, was of a very different disposition to his father, being gay, pleasure-loving and wildly extravagant. In order to complete his education and enable him to see something of the world before settling down, his father arranged for him to tour the Continent, exhorting him to study the peoples and customs of the different countries and to become as efficient in the various languages as possible. It was while he was in Italy, then the great centre of culture and intellect, that Brian met a beautiful Italian princess whom he seduced, leading her to believe that he fully intended to marry her. His infatuation

for her ended ; and ended, too, the generous remittances sent him by his father, he returned to England without even bidding the lady he had deceived good-bye.

Back at Rushton he became betrothed to Elizabeth, only child of Francis Trentham, Esq., son and heir of Sir Thomas Trentham of Rochester Priory, Staffordshire. He had known her when a boy, and there had been a sort of understanding between his parents and hers that, one day, he should marry her.

During the marriage service, people at St. Peter's noticed a veiled lady, in a white dress that looked remarkably like a bridal gown, enter the church and seat herself near the door, but they thought nothing of it, supposing she was some friend of the bride or bridegroom. Later on, when the bridal party were seated at the banquet table in Brian's home, the attention of all was suddenly arrested by the entry of a veiled feminine form in white, the same figure that had been seen in the church. There was something strange about the visitant, something that checked the merry talk and laughter and cast a spell of silence over the whole assemblage. The bride shuddered, the bridegroom turned deadly pale. Up the vaulted hall the veiled figure stole, right to the banquet table. Confronting Brian, she raised her veil and revealed to his terrified gaze the white, lovely features of the Italian princess he had deserted.

Raising a golden chalice from the table, as if to drink the health of the newly-wed pair, she pronounced, instead, a curse on them, prophesying that the bride would live in wretchedness and die in want, and, by way of emphasising her words, she dashed the chalice on the floor. Then, casting a look of

hatred at Brian and his bride, she turned and noiselessly left the hall. The whole scene had only lasted a few seconds, and as the bridal party gazed at one another in dismay, they began to wonder if the veiled figure who had uttered such terrible imprecations was real or something from another world. All doubts, however, were set at rest when people declared they had seen the mysterious lady leave the hall, in a coach with six black horses, and on reaching the cemetery of St. Peter's, instead of passing by it, drive right through the closed entrance and then suddenly and quite inexplicably fade away into nothingness amid the tombstones.

In fulfilment of the phantom's prophecy the marriage proved very unhappy. Lady Cullen, as she became on the death of her father-in-law, was one of the ladies-in-waiting to Queen Catherine and greatly admired for her beauty.

Among those who paid her considerable attention, and with whom she is said to have been very intimate, was the Duke of Monmouth. Her flirtations and wild extravagance were probably one of the causes that led to her husband giving way to drink and indulging in all kinds of dissipations. She survived him twenty-five years, and having parted with all her possessions died, almost penniless, in Kettering. It was after her death that the churchyard of Rushton was said to be periodically haunted by her ghost, as well as by a coach with six horses, that, on the anniversary of her marriage, was seen to come tearing along the road and passing through the closed churchyard gate, to vanish at her grave.

There are rumours that the site of St. Peter's is still at times haunted by two white lady ghosts,

one of whom is veiled and appears to be following the other.

A correspondent wrote to me some years ago to say she remembered hearing, when she was a child, a story to the effect that the churchyard of Welton, in Northamptonshire, was at one time haunted by a ghost that also haunted an adjoining meadow. So many people were scared by it that several of the local clergy put their heads together, with the result that resort was had to the ancient method of laying a ghost, that is to say of compelling the ghost, by prayer, to enter a bottle, and then sealing the bottle and either burying it or throwing it into deep water.

In this instance the bottle, supposed to contain the troublesome spirit, was dropped into a well in a field that subsequently acquired the name of Parsons' Close. Possibly, as some of the villagers said, because the bottle was not properly corked, or, what seems more likely, because the spirit was too fly to enter the bottle, the haunting still at times went on, and, if there is any truth in the rumour, even now continues, though, happily for the Weltonians, only at great intervals.

A strange story came to me, when I was living in Northamptonshire, about the village of Ringstead. In the year 1850 there was living in Ringstead a prosperous young butcher named William Weekly Ball, who was known to have been cohabiting with Lydia Atley, a pretty village belle, up to the time he took to courting someone in a better social position. Soon after this happened Lydia came to the cottage of Joseph Groom, labourer, one morning and told his wife that she was going to see Weekly Ball about money that night, and if she did not have it there

would be a row. That evening Groom was standing under a wooden hoarding skirting Ball's orchard, when he heard Lydia, who had a very distinctive voice, say, "I believe you mean killing me to-night, Weekly Ball," and later, "the Lord have mercy on me, if I am to die in the state I am." It seemed to him that her voice grew weaker as she uttered these last words. He could not see her, though it was moonlight, because she was in the orchard. It is amazing to think that he had neither the gumption nor courage either to enter the orchard or to call out; had he done either, it is possible a life would have been saved, but like the stupid, selfish yokel he was, he made off, telling himself it was none of his business.

A short time prior to this conversation Mr. John Hill, a local farmer, was standing in one of his fields, when he heard footsteps and voices, and peering over the hedge saw a man and girl coming along the lane leading to Ball's orchard. When they drew nearer and came into the moonlight, which was very powerful, he saw they were Weekly Ball and pretty Lydia Atley. As they passed him he heard Lydia say, "I won't, I won't, it's yours or nobody else's." They walked on, and presently he heard the latch of Ball's orchard click. He did not see them enter the orchard because the hedge obstructed his view. What he had overheard was significant, because Lydia was known to be about to give birth to a child. After this night, Lydia was never seen in Ringstead again, and to this day her fate remains a mystery, though it seems to be only too likely that she met her end at the hands of the dastardly Ball.

Fifteen years after the disappearance of Lydia, a

labourer named Warren, cleaning out a ditch leading from Denford to Keystone, came across the skeleton of a woman. There was no clothing on her. Medical examination showed she was about the same height and age as Lydia, and what made it all the more probable that it was Lydia's skeleton was the fact that two teeth were missing, and a man in Ringstead remembered extracting two corresponding teeth from Lydia some time before she disappeared. The spot where the body was found was not far from Ball's orchard.

Ball was arrested on the charge of murdering Lydia Atley, and committed for trial by the Thrapston magistrates. In spite, however, of what to most people must have appeared as very damning evidence against him, he was acquitted, the defence arguing that as the place where the skeleton was found was close to a piece of waste ground used as a burial place by gipsies, the skeleton Warren unearthed could not be proved for certain to be that of Lydia. It might have been a gipsy's. Indignation in and around Ringstead was, I am glad to say, so strong against Ball, who appears to have been an odiously conceited and smug individual, that he had to leave the neighbourhood. Of what subsequently became of him I have no record.

And now for the psychic phenomena in connection with the case. After Lydia's disappearance people passing Ball's orchard at night affirmed they saw a figure, resembling the missing girl, emerge from the orchard and walk sometimes in the direction of the ditch where the skeleton was subsequently found, and sometimes to the local churchyard. Arriving at the churchyard, it would open the gate,

and then pausing as if reluctant to enter, it would turn, and making for the orchard again, disappear very inexplicably on reaching it. This haunting, so my informant, who remembered the trial of Weekly Ball, assured me, did not cease with the discovery of the skeleton but went on, intermittently, for some years. He said that the sexton of the church had told him that he had seen the ghost at the churchyard gate many times, and that, without the shadow of doubt, it was Lydia Atley's.

## CHAPTER VI

## SOME LEICESTERSHIRE HAUNTED CHURCHES

NEW YEAR'S EVE and St. Mark's Eve are nights in the year when phantoms of those that are doomed to die within the next twelve months are believed to appear ; in the case of St. Mark's Eve, usually in certain churchyards, one of which is Kilncote,<sup>1</sup> Leicestershire.

It used to be the custom for people curious to pry into the future to sit up in the porch of this church on St. Mark's Eve and wait for the super-physical doubles of the doomed to enter the church. In order to be successful the vigil had to be performed, on this particular night, for three successive years, and not until the third occasion did the phantoms put in appearance, and à propos of this superstition, here is one of many stories :

About the middle of the last century two young men, living in the neighbourhood of Kilncote, decided to put the local belief in the haunting of the parish church on St. Mark's Eve to the test. Accordingly, they went to the church, in secret, and for two successive St. Mark's Eve's nothing happened. The third year found them there again.

It was a bright moonlight night, and very still. The church clock had long ceased striking the midnight hour, when they heard, in the distance,

<sup>1</sup> See *The Ghost World*, by the Rev. T. T. Dyer.

the tapping of high heels, and presently there loomed in sight, vividly outlined against the background of moonlit sky, the figure of a girl in white.

As she drew nearer, they saw she was wearing a dark shawl over her dress, and on her head a sunbonnet, which concealed her features, permitting only a few golden curls to be seen.

Thrilled beyond words, the two youths, sitting closer and closer to one another, watched the figure approach them. Arriving at the churchyard, it passed through the gate and came mincing up the path. Still they could not see its face, which continued to be shaded by the bonnet, and it was not until it was close to them that its features became visible. "Good God, Bill," one of the youths exclaimed, clutching hold of the other. "Bella!" Bella was his sister.

The figure passed through the closed door and disappeared. Hardly had it done so, when the churchyard gate clicked and another figure came walking up the path. This time it was that of a middle-aged woman in black. Its features were screened from view by a handkerchief it was holding to its face. George, the youth who had spoken before, gave a gasp of dismay. Though he could not see the phantom's face, there was something about its walk, clothes and general appearance that seemed peculiarly familiar. As happened in the case of Bella, its features suddenly became visible. "Oh, God," George screamed, "my Mother. Let's go, I can't bear to stay here any longer."

Bill was only too ready, but as they were rising, the latch of the gate clicked again and the figure of a young man in a cheap ready-made suit came

hurrying up the path. On seeing it George fainted. It was his own fetch or spirit double. Within the next few months an epidemic broke out in the neighbourhood of Kilncote and among the victims were George, his mother and Bella.

Also in Leicestershire is the church of Misterton, and standing in its cemetery is a tree, beneath the branches of which a bloody footprint is said, every now and then, to appear. I went to the churchyard one day with a friend who pointed the tree out to me, but I saw nothing bearing any marked resemblance to a footprint under it. Still, I was told by someone living in the neighbourhood that a blood-red footprint was to be seen periodically, and she narrated a story in explanation of it. Many years ago a pedlar was waylaid by thieves. Managing to break away from them he made for the church, hoping the parson or some other church official would be there. He was overtaken, however, in the churchyard and cruelly murdered, under the aforesaid tree. Before he received the fatal blow he said : " Whichever of you kills me, will be doomed to haunt this spot for ever and always, on the anniversary of my death, he will be forced by the Great Unknown Powers to come here and leave the imprint of his foot where my body falls." The thieves mocked him, and one of them unsheathing a dagger plunged it in his heart.

Some years later, on the anniversary of the murder, either the sexton of the church or one of the congregation, on entering the churchyard, noticed the imprint of a large foot under the tree that had witnessed the foul deed, and it was swimming with blood.

And ever since then, at long intervals apart, but always on an anniversary of the murder, that bloody footprint has appeared, to disappear the same night. Such was our informant's story ; how much authenticity underlies it I am not in a position to say.

In Hinckley church there was, some years ago, and for all I know to the contrary there may be still, what was known as the Bloody Tomb.

It derived its name on account of "gouts" of liquid resembling, in colour, blood, which were frequently found on it. According to tradition, in the year 1727, Richard Smith, a young local man, had been struck down and killed by a recruiting sergeant in Duck-puddle for making a jest the sergeant resented, and ever afterwards drops of blood appeared periodically on his tomb. The villagers believed this was because the sergeant had suffered no punishment for the crime.

I think it possible that the phenomena in the case of the imprint at Misterton and the tomb at Hinckley might find an explanation in some perfectly natural cause, as regards the latter in the red sandstone constituting the wall by the tomb. The sandstone wearing away through various causes, particles of it may have fallen on the tomb and becoming dissolved in moisture, arising from the damp atmosphere of the building, would have presented an appearance sufficiently red to create a belief in the minds of the superstitious villagers that it was blood. In the case of the imprint at Misterton, the "bloody" phenomenon there may be due to some natural peculiarity in the soil or in the overshadowing tree.

Apart, however, from the "bloody" gouts, Hinckley church is rumoured to have been haunted

at times by footsteps that paced restlessly up and down the aisles in the grey hours of the morning.

It was believed they were those of a monk who came to an untimely end in the days when a Priory occupied a site somewhere near the present parish church.

I was told, when I was in the neighbourhood of Hinckley, that the ghost has been heard in the church during the present century, and not so very long ago.

In Leicester there are quite a number of houses and places that are, or have been, at times, haunted. One of the most notorious Leicester ghosts was that of a Mrs. Smalley,<sup>1</sup> said to have been laid by a vicar of St. Martin's.

I have been told and have read of many cases where attempts to lay ghosts have been made, with temporary, at any rate, successful results. I should certainly advise people who are disturbed by ghostly happenings in their homes to seek the aid of some church or long-established and recognised religious body rather than employ a "medium." I have, from time to time, taken professional "mediums" with me to haunted places, and never with, in any way, satisfactory results. What they have declared they have seen or heard have had no bearing on the case at all, and though they have always professed to have laid the ghost the hauntings have invariably continued. Though there are cases in which super-physical phenomena could not, I feel sure, be laid by anyone, there are others that, I feel, might be satisfactorily dealt with by persons, really good (not very easy to find, I admit), belonging to a bona-fide old-established church or Religious Order,

<sup>1</sup> See *Leicester Chronicle*, 28th Nov. 1874.

which has for centuries practised exorcism and the laying of earth-bound spirits.

There are, in my opinion, to-day too many people, not coming under this head, who profess to be able to lay ghosts. Some of them may honestly believe they have this power but the majority are just fakers and charlatans.

But to continue with Leicester. Two houses in St. Martin's churchyard were once very much haunted.<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to get any details regarding one, but, regarding the other, all the bells used to ring without visible cause or any traceable agency. A Leicester lady correspondent informed me that the churchyard itself was haunted by a hooded figure that used to be seen, on certain nights in the year, gliding about and kneeling, with one ear to the ground, in the attitude of listening. No serious sequence to its visitations was apprehended, unless it reached out one of its long arms and touched anyone, when it was a sure sign that that person would shortly die.

A house at the end of Friar Lane was haunted by an invisible ghost that used to be heard walking about the building and rattling door-handles, and an old man told me that, when he was a boy, he was often followed at night by footsteps that usually began about the middle of the lane and always ended in front of St. Mary's church. Only on one occasion did he see anything ghostly, and that was one Midsummer Eve. He was going along the lane when he suddenly saw, moving along by his side and clearly outlined on the ground, the shadow of a headless man with something like a hump on his

<sup>1</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 28th Nov. and 5th Dec. 1874.

back. The shadow kept pace with him till he came to St. Mary's church, when it left him, and he watched it go right up to the main entrance of the church and there disappear.

Another ghost used to haunt a house in Sanvey Gate and also the immediate vicinity of St. Margaret's church, but of this I have no details.

Returning to Hinckley, according to a tradition, a child was once flogged to death by its cruel step-mother in the old hall that formerly stood near the churchyard, and afterwards its spirit took to haunting not only the old hall but the churchyard.

The method resorted to at Welton, *i.e.* bottling the ghost, was tried in this instance, the sealed bottle being thrown into a pool, and, as in the case of the Welton ghost, it was rumoured to have been ineffectual, the haunting still continuing at intervals.

## CHAPTER VII

WARWICKSHIRE AND SHROPSHIRE  
HAUNTINGS

THE parish church of Ilmington in Warwickshire was, and some say still, at times, is, haunted by the ghost of a parish clerk who died in 1793.

He, or rather what was believed to be his ghost, used constantly to be seen perambulating the aisles, muttering the responses, as he was in the habit of doing in his lifetime.

An older ghost is that of a woman, believed to have been the widow of a soldier killed at Edge Hill. A gentleman I met two years ago in Leamington told me that several people had told him they had seen it in a lane near Lighthorne and just outside Lighthorne churchyard. It resembled a very thin woman in white, with a wan, troubled face. She appeared to be crying bitterly, and when at the churchyard she would gaze wistfully in the direction of the church, and wring her hands.

The same gentleman also told me there was a rumour in Lighthorne about ghostly lights having been seen about thirty years ago, hovering over a spot in or near one of the aisles of the parish church, and on digging there several skeletons were unearthed. After this the lights were not seen again.

According to a local tradition, a nun was mur-

dered, several centuries ago, in Warwick Priory, and her ghost is said to still haunt the ruins. I was trying to photograph the ruins one day, when an elderly man, who might have been a fairly well-to-do tradesman, spoke to me. "Yes," he said, when I told him I had heard the ruins were said to be haunted; "I could tell you something about the place, too." At my request, he then narrated to me the following incident.

"It was just after the War," he began. "I was walking, late one evening, up the path skirting the Priory grounds, from the railway station, when a tall figure, that seemed to rise from nowhere, crossed the path just in front of me and passing through the Priory railings vanished on the other side. When I say vanished," he explained, "I mean I was looking at it one moment, and the very next moment at empty space. It was inexplicable."

I asked him to describe the figure.

"Well," he said, "it is rather difficult because there was nothing very definite about it. It certainly gave me the impression it was a woman, clad in a garb that might have been a nun's. A light, or glow, seemed to emanate from within her, making it appear as though she was composed of molecules in a state of constant vibration. She was gone too quickly for me to observe many details. Stay," he added, "I did notice one thing, and that gave me something like a shock, one of her hands was missing. It appeared to have been lopped off at the wrist, which was gory."

"You didn't see her face?" I said.

"No," he replied, "what she was wearing over her head hid it." He went on to tell me that one of

the worst haunted localities in Warwickshire was that between Bidford and Hilborough.

One of his friends, Sam Martin, was walking past a churchyard in the neighbourhood one night, when he heard the rumbling of wheels in the distance, and presently, round a bend in the road, there shot into view a coach-like vehicle with four black horses. As it drew nearer, he saw it was not a coach but a hearse, and that the driver was headless. Being a moonlight night he could see it very plainly, and he shrank against a hedge to get out of its way. It came tearing along, the thing on the box cracking a whip and the horses panting and foaming. On reaching the churchyard it passed through the gate and, without pausing, careered on, into the church itself, through the closed door. When his friend told the vicar of the church about it he said, "That means one of the most esteemed members of my congregation will die shortly. The ghost coach never enters the church except before the death of a member of his family, but, for goodness' sake, keep what you saw to yourself, at any rate for the present."

"My friend," my informant concluded, "left the neighbourhood before he was able to ascertain if the parson's prophecy had been fulfilled."

I learned from another source that Hilborough Lane and a churchyard in its near proximity are haunted by a phantom white lady and a phantom white stag. The former ghost is popularly believed to be that of a lady who was murdered, under circumstances of exceptional atrocity, in a field flanking the lane and buried in the neighbouring cemetery.

As to the origin of the stag haunting that is

difficult to say; it may date back to the days when stag hunting took place in the county of Warwick, the phantom being that of a victim of the barbarous so-called sport. Possibly the stag was chased from Hilborough Lane to the churchyard, where it was cornered and cruelly butchered. It has been suggested that the female phantom is that of a lady of title who followed the chase and took a delight in cutting the throats of the poor cornered stags. This seems to me as likely an explanation of the haunting as any. People who revel in chasing and killing, or gloatingly witnessing the killing of, such beautiful and harmless creatures as stags deserve, after death, to be well punished for their cruelty.

Warwickshire abounds in abbeys, one of which is Coombe (Combe) Abbey, the seat of the Earl of Craven. I am not in a position to say whether it is haunted or not. Most old abbeys are supposed to harbour ghosts; but associated with a picture of a lady with a drinking horn, that used to hang, and for all I know to the contrary, still hangs, in the gallery of the abbey, there is a curious story.<sup>1</sup> A certain Count Otto, when hunting one day in the forest near the Abbey, encountered a lady holding in one hand a golden drinking horn. Being very thirsty, the Count asked her if she would very kindly allow him to drink out of the horn. On looking into it, however, he became so suspicious of the liquor, possibly it resembled blood, that he threw it away, and part of it falling on his horse singed the hair, like fire. We are not told what happened next, but I imagine Count Otto did not stay to cultivate the lady's friendship.

<sup>1</sup> See *Visits to Remarkable Places*, by William Howitt.

My regret is that all people who hunt stags, for that is what Count Otto, presumably, had been hunting, do not meet with similar "ladies," whose fiery liquor burns not their innocent horses but their cruel selves.

A case of another Warwickshire churchyard haunting came to me some time ago from Birmingham. A merchant of that city was cycling along a road, in the vicinity of Alveston, one night, when he suddenly became aware of a white dog by his side. Although he was pedalling fairly fast, the dog seemed to be merely walking, apparently leisurely. A gruesome light surrounded the animal. This, coupled with the loneliness of the road and the stillness, which was interrupted only at times by the dismal hooting of night birds, had such an unnerving effect on the merchant that, although not by any means a naturally timid man, he now increased his speed, pedalling his very hardest. But fast as he sped along, the dog kept easy pace with him, and still only seemingly walked. On entering a village he hoped the dog would leave him, but it still kept with him until they came to a church, when he saw it pass through the shut gate into the cemetery beyond. When he mentioned the incident to the people he was staying with, they said : "That white dog you saw has haunted these parts, intermittently, for centuries. It is a very old ghost and is supposed to date back to about the seventeenth century, when a pedlar and his dog were murdered somewhere near Alveston, at least so says tradition."

Stories of animal ghosts in Shropshire are very common.

A well-known one is that of the haunting of

Cuthery Hollow and a near-by church-cemetery by a phantom in the form of a colt. According to a tradition, a titled lady was buried with some of her most valuable jewels in a vault of Fitz church. Obrick, the parish clerk, knowing this, broke open the tomb and robbed the corpse. This is one version ; according to another, finding the lady had been buried alive he murdered her ; and, according to yet another version, he was so terrified at finding her alive that he dropped the jewels and fled. Whatever Obrick did, nothing prospered with him afterwards. "He niver no pace atter," the local villagers used to say. "A was sadly troubled in his yed and mithered." All versions agree that after he robbed, or attempted to rob, the tomb, Cuthery Hollow, and some say Fitz churchyard too, was haunted by a ghost in the form of a colt. The villagers named it "Obrick's Colt" and declared it was the phantom of the lady whose jewels the wicked Obrick had so coveted.<sup>1</sup>

A very unusual animal ghost haunting is associated with Hyssington church,<sup>2</sup> Shropshire. A man, who had lived a very evil life, died either in or near Bagbury. After his death the lanes round Bagbury began to be haunted by a phantom in the form of a bull, which the peasantry were convinced was his spirit, earth-bound on account of his wickedness. To see a bull coming towards one in a lane at night is not the most agreeable of spectacles, but when that bull roars and positively rushes, and is accompanied by an unearthly glow or light, it is apt to be downright

<sup>1</sup> References to this haunting are in *Shropshire Folk-Lore* publications and Hartshorne's *Salopia Antiqua*.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Ghost World*.

scaring, and those who encountered it were invariably more than merely scared. One woman is said to have had a fit forthwith, another to have fallen dead, killed from sheer shock, while a farmer was thrown from his stampeding horse and seriously injured. So many accidents and such widespread terror did the bull ghost cause that the villagers finally sought the aid of the clergy to lay it. Consequently, twelve parsons, with bibles and candles, waited in a lane for the ghost one night, and when it rushed past them, bellowing in a horrible manner, they ran after it. Down one turning and then another it went, with the panting, perspiring and undaunted clergy in hot pursuit. At last it came to Hyssington church and, without pausing, dashed through the closed gate into the churchyard. Thinking they had cornered it, the twelve clergy cheered lustily, but their triumph proved to be premature, for the bull, after careering about among the tombstones, rushed at and through a wall, and into the road beyond.

Finally, however, the ghost was run to earth in Bagbury, and having been induced by prayers and the lavish use of holy water to contract to a size sufficiently small to enter a snuff-box, it was sealed up and thrown into a pond. The haunting thus terminated, but when the parson of Hyssington went to the church the following morning he found, to his dismay and amazement, one of the walls was cracked from top to bottom.

Phantastic as this story of a roaring bull ghost may appear, it is not without a parallel, for Camille Flammarion mentions a very similar phenomenon in the hauntings of Calvados Castle.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Haunted Houses*, by Camille Flammarion.

Near Ironbridge are the ruins of a church. One autumn evening five years ago, accompanied by Mr. Byford Jones of *The Wolverhampton Express and Star*, I arrived at Wellington, in Shropshire. Our object was to try and find some reputed haunted spot whereat to hold a nocturnal vigil.

We had been to Church Stretton and various other places during the day, but our endeavours to discover what we wanted had proved in vain. Now, to our delight, we were informed by a friend of Jones's in Wellington that the church ruins near Ironbridge were haunted by the ghost of a woman in black.

How to get there was the question, for we had no car. I believe it was Jones's friend who suggested we should persuade a certain inn-keeper in Wellington to take us there in his car.

The inn-keeper, who was a well-known local soccer player and a friend of Gordon Richards, proved to be a great sport. Although the hour was late and the rain descending in torrents, he expressed his willingness to accompany us to the ruins. Neither he nor Byford Jones believed in ghosts, and the very idea of our seeing one filled the former with such merriment that, at times, he found it difficult to steer. The ruins were on the summit of a hill, and to get to them we had to make an ascent by a narrow, tortuous path, rendered horribly slippery by the heavy rain. Byford Jones had reached the ruins by the time the inn-keeper and myself had gained the summit of the hill. Facing us was a plateau, and on the opposite side of it were the ruins, hardly distinguishable, owing to the darkness and rain.

We were about to cross the plateau when the rain abruptly ceased, and the moon shone bright and serene in a sky fast clearing of clouds. "Who's that over there?" the inn-keeper ejaculated, clutching me by the arm. I looked in the direction he indicated and saw a woman, clad in black garments, emerge from some trees and cross the plateau.

When she arrived at the wall of the churchyard she stepped right into it and vanished.

"My God!" the inn-keeper exclaimed. "Did you see that? I could never have believed it. She must have been the ghost."

And there is no doubt she was, for nothing but a ghost could have disappeared in the manner she had done.

We did not stay long in the ruins, because we felt nothing further would happen. The ghost had appeared, and that, for one night, was enough. If the genial inn-keeper was not actually a sadder man, he was unquestionably wiser, for he no longer scoffed at the existence of what are termed ghosts. I learned from various sources that the haunting was very intermittent, there sometimes being long intervals between the appearances of the ghost, which was popularly supposed to be that of some unknown woman who had been found dead on the plateau and buried in the churchyard. It, the ghost, has on several occasions been seen wandering disconsolately among the tombstones.

Referring again to the old custom of trying to lay ghosts by "bottling them," there has long been a rumour that under a monument to one Squire Blount in Kinlet Church, Shropshire, there is a small

flat bottle, about eight inches long, which is strongly sealed because it contains the very troublesome ghost of the Squire.<sup>1</sup>

The story goes that after the Squire's death his pretty daughter married a page boy. This so incensed the departed squire that his ghost haunted Kinlet Old Hall, where his wilful daughter and her spouse lived, to such an extent that no one could stay in it. Not content with driving the married couple out of the old Hall, the ghost followed them to their new home and plagued not only them but the clergyman who had married them, not infrequently driving a phantom coach and four through Kinlet church during an evening service. As one may well imagine, this sort of thing was intolerable, and resort was made "to bottling," with, so tradition says, complete success.

Of course, in a county boasting of so many hauntings as does Shropshire, it is hardly surprising to hear of a submerged phantom church, and according to tradition one exists at Crosmere, near Ellesmere.<sup>2</sup> In the neighbourhood of Crosmere there are a number of pretty lakes, and on the shore of one of them there once stood a church. Owing to an earthquake, or to some other physical cause, the church was one day submerged, and its clergy and congregation drowned. Some time afterwards, a farmer was driving by the lake one evening, when he heard the chiming of church bells. As there was no church near he was much mystified, and then suddenly it dawned on him that the sounds came from the lake itself. He spread the news, and soon

<sup>1</sup> See *Shropshire Folk Lore*, by Miss Jackson.

<sup>2</sup> See *Notes and Queries*, vol. vii. p. 328.

the shores of the lake were thronged with villagers, listening to the phantom chiming.

That was many years ago, but periodically ever since, especially on still summer nights, those ghost-church bells can still be heard pealing.

## CHAPTER VIII

HEREFORDSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE  
CHURCH GHOSTS

A CONBURY CHURCH, in Herefordshire, was at one time haunted by a figure resembling a monk. It was believed to be the ghost of Roger de Clifford, in whose memory there was a monument in the church. The ghost was often seen and heard walking about the building. It had the very unpleasant habit of suddenly emerging from behind a pillar or from some dark corner and frightening people. A Mrs. Grey, whom I met when I was staying in a house in the Moorfields, Hereford, told me that a relative of hers once had an uncanny experience in the church.

She was visiting it one day with a relative, who was more interested than she was in old churches, when she felt someone touch her on the shoulder. Thinking it was her friend, she swung round, and confronted a tall, shadowy figure, in long flowing dark garments. She could not see its face because it was concealed by a cowl or hood. The figure moved away almost at once, with long strides, and disappeared behind a pillar. When she looked behind the pillar there was no sign of it. Though frightened, she said nothing about it at the time to her friend, for fear of scaring her. The next day she asked someone living in the neighbourhood if the church was haunted, and he said : " Well, there are rumours

that it sometimes is. Many years ago a ghost, popularly supposed to be that of Roger de Clifford, got so troublesome that the clergy of the district tried to bottle it, an old method of laying restless spirits, and buried the sealed bottle under Roger's monument. Apparently they only succeeded for a time, for the ghost is said still, periodically, to haunt the church. No harm results unless the ghost touches anyone; should it do that, the person it touches always dies before the year is out. Of course it is only silly village talk, but there may be something in it."

Probably the most notorious Herefordshire ghost is that of "Black Vaughan."

The Vaughans were once a very well-known family of landed proprietors in Herefordshire.<sup>1</sup> Sir Roger Vaughan won his spurs at Agincourt, and in the parish church of Kingston, Herefordshire, there are effigies of him and his wife. "Black Vaughan," so named either on account of his colouring or his sins, was the last in the male line.

After his death his ghost took to haunting Kingston churchyard, where it used to sit, at night, on the wall, and Hergest Park, the ancestral home of the Vaughans, where it used to stand under a tree, styled, in consequence, "Black Vaughan's" tree, close to the road leading from Kingston into Wales, and when anyone passed by, it sprang out and frightened them nearly out of their wits.

According to Mr. Wirt Sykes<sup>2</sup> the ghost appeared in more than one form. Sometimes it resembled a nasty fly and terrified horses, and sometimes, in the guise of a black, sinister bull, it rushed roaring into

<sup>1</sup> See *History of Kingston*.

<sup>2</sup> See *British Goblins*, by Wirt Sykes.

Kingston church, not unnaturally panicking the congregation and putting an abrupt end to the service.

So scared were people at its antics that few of the congregation dared venture to evening service at the church, while the road it haunted was so shunned that it had to be abandoned altogether and a new route into Wales chosen. No moss or ivy grew on the wall where the ghost sat, or grass on the ground where it stood. In the end twelve clergy tried to lay it, and, so local report says, only partly succeeded, for although it was seen no more under the tree, it used at times to be seen on the church wall. But that was not the only ghost that haunted that locality, for I am told a phantom black dog, believed to be the ghost of a favourite dog of "Black Vaughan," used to haunt a pool by the side of the Kingston and Wales road, and terrorised the villagers to such an extent that none of them would go near the pool after dusk.

Many stories are told about the hauntings of the churchyards of Weobley and Tarrington by evil spirits, but in order to see the evil spirits it is necessary to go alone to those places at midnight, and walking seven times round the cemeteries and churches, to repeat over and over again the Lord's Prayer backwards.

When I was in the neighbourhood of Weobley I was asked if I would try the experiment, and I said no, that during my many years of investigating haunted houses and places I had seen so many unpleasant, apparently, spontaneous phenomena that I had no desire to try any methods of invocation, especially in such a sacred place as a churchyard.

An aged native of Herefordshire told me that in his youth he and several other lads had gone one

All Hallow's E'en to Weobley churchyard, and that, on their completing the seventh round of the church, a black, shadowy figure, with something like horns on its head, emerged from behind a tombstone and ran at them, waving its arms. They took to flight instantly, and one of them was ill for months afterwards.

They never ventured near the church again late at night. I asked him if it might not have been one of the villagers playing a trick, and he said no, because the same figure appeared there to a young local farmer, who struck at it with a cudgel, and the cudgel went right through it.

A ghost dog, according to a former Hereford schoolmaster, used to haunt the churchyards of Michaelchurch and a neighbouring church ; it alternated between the two and sometimes appeared with a head and sometimes without one.

Like Herefordshire, Worcestershire possesses many reputed haunted houses, but I have not been able to hear of more than one or two haunted religious buildings.

Richard Baxter<sup>1</sup> says the precincts of Worcester cathedral, particularly College Green, were once haunted by a phantom bear that appeared to a sentry there in the days of the Great Civil War, and so scared him that he deserted his post in a panic. We are not told if he was punished for so doing ; let us hope not, for surely the sudden spectacle of a bear, and a ghost bear too, was punishment enough. Bear ghosts are not, however, uncommon ; one used to haunt the Tower of London,<sup>2</sup> and another,

<sup>1</sup> See *The Certainty of the World of Spirits*, by Richard Baxter.

<sup>2</sup> See Article on *Notes and Queries*, 1860, by Edmund Lenthal Swift, at one time Keeper of the Crown Jewels.

according to the late Mr. Mellor, the garden of a house on the Chelsea Embankment.

The late Duke of Newcastle, who accompanied me on several of my visits to haunted places in London, told me of a ghostly incident he had heard of in connection with St. Helen's church, Worcester.

A lady informed him that her mother, for convenience sake I will call her Lady Graye, was viewing St. Helen's one day, when her attention was drawn to a little girl, in deep mourning, who was hunting frantically about on the floor of one of the aisles, as if searching for something. Presently the child, raising her head, glanced round at Lady Graye, who saw she was crying. She looked so white and ill that Lady Graye, feeling very sorry for her, said, "What is it you've lost ? Can I help you find it ?"

Instead of replying the child ran into the chancel and suddenly vanished. It was a dark afternoon, and Lady Graye tried to persuade herself that her losing sight of the little girl so abruptly was due to the gloom, but there was such an uncanny feeling about the place that she was glad to get out into the open air.

A peculiar fascination for the church drew her there again, either the next day or the day after, and she again saw the little girl, and the same thing happened. The child ran away directly Lady Graye addressed her, and disappeared in the same sudden and mysterious manner.

Encountering some official belonging to the church, Lady Graye casually said : "Who is that little girl that was hunting for something in one of the aisles ? I've seen her both days I've been here."

The official, looking, so Lady Graye thought, a

trifle scared, exclaimed : " Little girl ! What little girl, madam ? " Feeling sure from his manner that he was merely prevaricating, Lady Graye persisted, till eventually he very reluctantly said : " Well, madam, I can only tell you that several casual visitors, like yourself, to this church have told me they have seen her here, but who or what she is, is quite beyond me to say."

## CHAPTER IX

HAUNTINGS IN NOTTS, OXFORDSHIRE  
AND YORKSHIRE

**T**HREE is a belief in Raleigh, Nottinghamshire<sup>1</sup> that several centuries ago an ancient village once occupied its site, that it was swallowed up in an earthquake, and that ever since then, on Christmas morning, the bells of its church can be heard ringing by anyone possessing the faculty of clairaudience, who going into the adjacent valley and lying down, listens intently, with one ear to the ground.

Dr. Lee narrates an interesting case of haunting in an old church in Oxfordshire, but unfortunately refrains from mentioning its name.<sup>2</sup>

An archæologist, with two of his sons, was visiting the church one day, when his eldest boy looking up a staircase leading to a singing and organ gallery at the west end of the building, saw the figure of a woman, clad in a winding sheet, standing erect, with its hands crossed. There was something so unearthly about the figure, which resembled a corpse, that the boy ran out of the church terrified, and making for home at top speed, told his mother what he had seen. He said he knew the figure was a ghost because he could see right through it. The next day the

<sup>1</sup> See *Notes and Queries*, vol. ix. p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Glimpses in the Twilight.*

archæologist asked the sexton's wife if she had ever seen anything of a ghostly nature in or near the church, and she said : " No, I've only heard noises in the vaults under the church, caused by old, decayed coffins giving way and falling." She went on to say, however, that there were many people in the town who declared the church was haunted and that they had seen what they styled " the Singing-Gallery Ghost." According to their description it resembled " a tall woman in a shroud, with her hands crossed and tied at the wrists. Sometimes she stood at the top of the stairs and sometimes in the recess of the buttress outside the church." There was, apparently, no known cause to explain the haunting, which had gone on for a considerable time.

Yorkshire abounds in hauntings of all kinds. One of the most famous, which is associated with a window in Holy Trinity church, Micklegate, York, is all the more convincing because the manifestations have been witnessed by more than one person and, sometimes, in broad daylight. The following account of it appeared in *The Ripon and Richmond Chronicle*.<sup>1</sup> " In the middle of the service," writes a correspondent, " my eyes, which had hardly once moved from the left or north side of the (East) window, were attracted by a bright light, formed like a female, robed and hooded, passing from North to South, with a rapid gliding motion, outside the church, apparently at some distance. There are four divisions in the window, all of stained glass, but at the edge of each runs a rim of plain transparent glass, about two inches wide, and adjoining the stone-work.

<sup>1</sup> 6th May 1876.

" Through this rim especially could be seen what looked like a form transparent, but yet thick with light.

" The robe was long and trailed. About half an hour later it again passed from North to South, and having remained about ten seconds only, returned with what I believe to have been the figure of a young child, and stopped at the last pane but one and then vanished. I did not see the child again, but, a few seconds afterwards, the woman reappeared and completed the passage behind the last pane very rapidly."

The appearances, which have been witnessed by many people, have generally taken place on Trinity Sunday, and the hooded figure has sometimes had with her, in addition to the child, another adult female, believed to be the child's nurse.

Many accounts<sup>1</sup> of the haunting have been published, and many theories and stories circulated in attempts to explain its origin.

According to one story, a party of soldiers came one day, in the reign of Henry VIII, to plunder the convent attached to the church.

Having forced their way in they were confronted by the Abbess, who told them they could only proceed further over her body, and that, if they killed her, her spirit would haunt them for the rest of their lives, and would haunt the spot too, until a new holy building sprang up in the place of the convent which they had defiled. Mocking her, they slew her in the most barbarous manner. Whether her ghost haunted them or not tradition does not say, but it

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Baring Gould gives an account of it in *Yorkshire Oddities*.

haunted the convent till it was demolished, and many believe it is the hooded figure that still haunts Holy Trinity church.

York Minster, too, has had its ghosts. An interesting account of a superphysical incident there was published in the one time popular *Album*.<sup>1</sup>

A party of people from London were visiting the Minster one day. One of them, Mr. C—, was with a young lady, away from the others, exploring the curiosities of the building, when he saw a young officer in naval uniform approaching them. Wondering why an officer was wearing his uniform so far from the sea, Mr. C— was about to comment on it to his companion when he was struck by her pallor. She appeared to be much agitated and to be labouring under some deep emotion. As the officer drew nearer, and his face and form became more visible through the evening gloom, the girl's agitation increased.

She caught hold of Mr. C—'s arm and he could feel her trembling. Her lips parted, as if she was about to say something, but no words came. She stood silently gazing at the officer, her lovely eyes full of terror and amazement.

The young officer's eyes were fixed with a strange look of intenseness on the girl, and as he passed them Mr. C— heard him say in low but very distinct tones : "There is a future life." He went on and was speedily lost to sight amid the gloom and shadows of the great building. The girl's father now came up to them, and supported her, as she seemed to be on the verge of fainting, while Mr. C—, whose

<sup>1</sup> See November 1822.

curiosity had been greatly excited, hurried after the young officer, to ascertain what had become of him. He returned after a while, looking much puzzled, and announced that though he had searched everywhere, not a trace of the officer could be found, nor had anyone he had spoken to seen him. The girl, who had by this time recovered, informed him, in a whisper, that she had something to tell him in private.

When they were alone again, she explained the reason of her recent behaviour. "My brother and I," she said, "often used to discuss the question of another life, and we made a compact that the one who died first should appear to the other, to remove all his or her doubt on the subject. When I saw the figure in naval uniform approach, I knew at once it was the spirit of my brother and that, true to his promise, he had come to let me know that there is life beyond the grave. I shall hear of his death soon." She was right, for, within a few days, her father received a letter, saying his son had died, on the very day and hour his form had been seen by his sister and Mr. C— in York Minster.

Whitby Abbey is popularly believed to be haunted, at times, by a variety of ghostly phenomena,<sup>1</sup> among them a figure supposed to be the phantom of the Lady Hilda.

She, or rather it, appears in daylight, normally between 10 a.m. and noon, during the summer season, and has, I am told, been photographed, the photograph depicting a shadowy face peering out of a window.

<sup>1</sup> County Folk-Lore publications.

A treasure is rumoured to be buried in the Abbey and, from time to time, attempts, usually clandestine, have been made to locate it. On one occasion, so the story goes, a Nonconformist minister and his daughter, armed with spades, stole into the abbey one moonlight summer night and, separating, commenced digging in what they thought were likely spots. They had been thus engaged perhaps an hour or so, when a hand tapped the daughter lightly on the shoulder.

"Yes, Pa," she said, "what is it?" There was no reply, only another tap.

"Stop it, Pa," she exclaimed irritably. "Don't be so silly. Why can't you speak!" Still no response but another tap. She looked round angrily and saw, not her father, but a tall figure in white, with no head, whereupon she fainted.

On another occasion, a man and a boy were passing near the abbey, early one morning, on their way to work, when they heard the sound of wheels in their rear.

They moved to the side of the road and a great hearse-like coach-and-four tore past them, driver and horses lacking heads. In terrified silence they watched it disappear in the direction of the abbey.

There is also a bell tradition in connection with the abbey.<sup>1</sup> When the abbey was suppressed in 1539, its bells were sold and put on board a ship, to be taken to London. The vessel had not, however, got out of sight of shore, before, from some mysterious cause, it sank. Fishermen sailing near the spot some days later were astounded to hear the chiming of bells proceeding from the sea-bed, and, periodically,

<sup>1</sup> See *The Ghost World*.

ever since they have continued to send forth their ghostly music.

Up from the heart of the ocean  
The mellow music peals,  
Where the sunlight makes its golden path,  
And the seamew flits and wheels.

For many a chequered century  
Untired by flying time,  
The bells no human fingers touch  
Have rung their hidden chime.

Reference has already been made in this book to the belief in some counties that if a person keeps watch in a certain church porch, on St. Mark's Eve (April 24), for an hour on each side of midnight for three successive years (some consider one year is sufficient), he will see the forms of those doomed to die within the next twelve months pass, one by one, into the church. In Yorkshire it is further believed that if the watcher falls asleep during his vigil, he will die himself in the course of the year. An authentic case of a St. Mark's Eve vigil is related by Mr. William Henderson.<sup>1</sup> On St. Mark's Eve, 1786, an old woman of Scarborough went to the porch of St. Mary's church in order to see into the future. On the stroke of midnight "figure after figure glided into the church, turning round to her as they went on, so that she recognised their familiar faces. At last a figure turned and gazed at her; she knew herself, screamed, and fell senseless to the ground, but she did not long survive the shock." Mr. Henderson goes on to say: "An old man, who recently died at Fishlake, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, was in the

<sup>1</sup> *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties*.

habit of keeping these vigils, and was, in consequence, an object of some dread to his neighbours. I have heard of the rite in Cleveland too, and at Teesdale, and one instance has come before me at Ford in Northumberland."

## CHAPTER X

YORKSHIRE HAUNTED CHURCHES  
*(continued)*

THERE is a curious rumour regarding St. George's church, York. It is said that, occasionally, a phantom rabbit is seen at night, or in the early hours of the morning, scampering about the aisles. Attempts have been made to catch it, but always without success. It is supposed to be the ghost of Dick Turpin, who, according to a popular belief, was buried in the old cemetery of the church.<sup>1</sup>

All kinds of stories have at various times been circulated regarding ghostly happenings at St. Crux church, York.

One told me some years ago by a York police constable was as follows :

One of his mates was pacing along The Pavement one night when, on coming to St. Crux, he heard, to his surprise, the sounds of music proceeding from within. He stopped to listen. It was the Funeral March being played on the organ, in crescendo. He was dumbfounded. A funeral service at this hour of the night, and no hearse and carriages ! Gradually the sounds became softer, and the door of the church slowly opened. The astounded policeman who watched, his eyes bulging, saw nothing, but he was conscious of something coming out of the church, and not only heard the rustling of dresses but felt

<sup>1</sup> See *Folk-Lore* publications of Yorkshire.

them swish against his legs as they swept him. When this ceased, the door of the church gently closed, and darkness and silence once again reigned within. My informant assured me his mate was very matter-of-fact and non-imaginative, a stolid North Countryman.

People passing the church at night have not infrequently declared that a female figure, in a shroud, has come out of it and followed them, either down Fossgate, vanishing as soon as it got to Foss Bridge, or along Collier Gate and St. Andrew Gate, vanishing directly it reached Spenn Lane.

It has also been stated that sometimes during service, even in the day-time, the very white face of a man has been seen peering in at one of the windows. This has happened when watch has been kept outside the church, and no one has been seen by the watchers at the window in question.

All sorts of queer stories are told, too, of the other Pavement church, All Saints. One of its ghosts appears in the day-time as well as at night, thus constituting another case that upsets the absurd idea, so prevalent, that hauntings only occur during the night.

This particular day-time ghost is described as resembling a woman in black, with a very red, swollen face, and long hair, worn in the old fashioned cork-screw style. It used to be seen, most often, at funeral services in the church. On one occasion, while the congregation were kneeling, one of them suddenly experienced a cold current of air. Wondering where it came from, as the weather was extremely warm, he looked round.

Behind him, the only person in his rear was a

woman, much begarbed in black, in spite of the excessive heat. Her face, red and swollen, as if she was suffering from some malignant disease, was so unsightly that it shocked him. He tried to avert his gaze but the woman's eyes, which glared balefully into his, hypnotized him, and he could not look elsewhere. This state of things lasted till the congregation rose, when, still glaring at him, she left the pew and crossing to the opposite side of the building disappeared from view behind a pillar. When, after the service, he mentioned the incident to one of the sidesmen he knew, the latter said : " Oh, that woman, she's the ghost. She is frequently seen at funeral services here and sometimes at burials. Once a lady, to see if she was material, tried to poke her with an umbrella, and the umbrella went right through her without encountering any resistance. On another occasion a choir boy threw a book at her, and a similar thing happened, the book passed right through her."

A woman who kept a stall in Ousegate was said to be the only person who had spoken to the ghost and been answered by it. She professed to know the origin of the haunting and the identity of the ghost, but she would never reveal her information. After her death the haunting ceased for a time, only, so rumour had it, to begin again intermittently.

The churchyard at Guisborough was at one time said to be haunted by the ghost of someone bearing none too good a reputation, who was buried there.

A carrier, driving by it in his cart one night, saw a figure in white sitting on a tombstone. His horse, apparently, saw it too, for it bolted, with the result he was thrown and badly injured.

On another occasion a party of youths, owing a man, who was temporarily acting as sexton, a grudge, planned to scare him by dressing up as ghosts. A death had occurred in the village, and hearing the sexton was going one evening to dig the deceased person's grave, they chose that night for putting their plot into execution. Secreting themselves behind some bushes, they put on sheets, and chuckling at the prospect of the fun in store for them, waited impatiently for the arrival of their victim. Presently, they heard the latch of the gate click and footsteps crunch up the churchyard path. "Now's the time," one of them whispered, and emitting dismal groans and wails they sprang out from their hiding-place, to confront not the sexton but a tall shrouded figure, with a ghastly, grinning death's head. When the acting sexton arrived on the scene, some half an hour later, he was surprised to find the ground littered with the sheets the youths had dropped in their flight. And that was the end of their plot. They never dressed up as ghosts in that churchyard again.

Many accounts of the haunting of Calverley Hall and churchyard have been published. The following is an extract from an article by Mr. Samuel Margerison of Calverley, that appeared in *The Yorkshireman*.<sup>1</sup>

Walter Calverley, whose father was a rich Roman Catholic, was a wild, reckless man, though his wife was a most estimable and virtuous lady. It is said that he inherited insanity from his mother's family. Be that as it may, on the 23rd of April 1604, he went into a fit of insane frenzy of jealousy, or pretended to do so.

<sup>1</sup> 5th January 1884.

The fact was he had completely beggared himself and got "over head and ears" in debt. Money-lenders were pressing him hard, and he had become desperate. Rushing madly into the house, he snatched up one and then another of his children; plunged his dagger into them, threw them down, and then attempted to take the life of their mother. A steel corset which she wore was luckily in the way, and saved her life.

The assassin, however, thought he had killed her, and left hurriedly. He then mounted his horse, intending to kill the only other child he had, Henry, a "brat at nurse" who was then at Norton. He was pursued by some villagers, his horse fell and threw him, and so he was caught. When brought to trial at York, he refused to plead, knowing that thereby his estates would not be forfeited to the Crown, but would descend to his surviving son.

He was pressed to death by iron weights, or stones, put on his chest, till it was crushed in, a barbarous method of capital punishment employed in this country up to the end of the eighteenth century, some say even later.

One of his old servants who tried to hasten his end, in order to relieve him, was at once seized and hanged. Calverley was buried at St. Mary's, Castle-gate, York, but a rumour spread that his friends secretly disinterred his remains and had them removed to Calverley churchyard. Anyhow both churchyards, St. Mary's and Calverley, obtained the reputation of being haunted by his ghost. Regarding the haunting of Calverley churchyard, an article entitled "Calverley, Forty Years Ago," appeared in a Bradford paper, March 1874. In it the writer described how he and some of his schoolfellows used to go to the churchyard, in order to evoke the iron ghost. Having piled their hats and caps on the ground, in the form of a pyramid, they took hold of

each other's hands and, forming a circle, danced round and round, crying out :

Old Calverley, old Calverley, I have thee by the ears,  
I'll cut thee into collops, unless thee appears.

After this had gone on for some time, probably till they were all hoarse, they strewed breadcrumbs mixed with pins on the soil, and then some of the boldest of them went to each of the church doors, and after whistling through the keyholes, repeated once more the magical couplet. This was the culminating effort, if the ghost did not emerge now from the church, wherein it was believed to be secreted, no further attempts to lure it forth that day would be of avail. On one occasion, at least, so the writer affirms, the ghost did actually appear and so frightened the youths that they fled, pell mell, leaving their caps, hats, and other belongings behind them.<sup>1</sup>

After that, they never again experimented in trying to evoke ghosts.

Calverley's ghost is still rumoured to haunt the locality of the churchyard and lanes and roads in the district. It is said sometimes to appear on foot and sometimes on a headless horse, followed by a number of other wild and sinister-looking ghosts, similarly clad, that is to say in seventeenth-century costume, and similarly mounted.

Issuing either from or near the churchyard, the spectral horsemen, after galloping madly through wind and rain, or mist, or moonlight, generally disappear on the site of an old quarry.

Efforts by past local clergy to lay these tiresome spectres have, apparently, proved abortive.

<sup>1</sup> See *Picturesque England*, by L. Valentine.

Yorkshire is rich in old abbeys, priories and other ancient buildings, many of which are in ruins. Associated with most of them are legends and traditionary stories, and not a few are reputed to have, at one time, been haunted. Take Kirkstall Abbey, for example. Of the multiple strange and tragic stories attached to it the following is one of the saddest.

Many years ago there lived near the abbey a pretty and, wonderful to relate, very virtuous inn-keeper's daughter named Mary. She had many admirers, as is the case with all pretty girls, and as so often happens, instead of falling in love with a decent youth, she fell in love with just the reverse, a good-looking young rotter who, unknown to her, chased after other girls, drank and did various other exceedingly unpleasant things. Mary's friends hinted to her that her loved one was not all that could be desired, but she would not believe them. One rather dark night two male customers were having supper at the inn, and Mary was waiting on them.

As the wind howled mournfully round the house and down the wide old chimney, one of the customers said : "It's just the night for the ghost to put in an appearance at the abbey ruins. Do you believe in ghosts, Mary ?" Mary shook her pretty head. "No," she laughed. "Nor in fairies or goblins either."

"Well," the customer remarked. "If you don't believe in ghosts, you wouldn't mind going to the ruins at any hour, would you ?"

"I wouldn't mind," Mary enjoined, "provided there was some sensible reason for my going, and the weather permitted it."

The other customer clapped his hands. "Good," he cried. "Spoken like the well-brought-up, sophisticated maiden that you are. But supposing we provide you with a reason for visiting the ruins now. I'll give you five shillings if you'll go to them and bring back, as evidence of your being there, a branch from one of the trees that grows close to them."

There were several trees at the abbey belonging to species not to be found anywhere else in the immediate neighbourhood, and it was one of these trees the customer proceeded to name. Mary, who saw a chance of displaying her courage and getting at the same time money, which she needed, laughingly accepted the challenge. It was a trial of courage, for the wind was getting wilder and the night darker.

She had, however, no fear. Putting on her hat and cloak she set off to the ruins.

And very ghostly they looked, looming through the gloom and swaying trees. She had picked a branch from the specified tree and was about to return to the inn, when she heard heavy footsteps in the cloister, approaching her. Thinking it prudent to get out of sight, she at once hid behind a pillar. Presently, she saw two men coming along the cloister, carrying the body of what, in the dim, uncertain light, looked like a man. They were close to her hiding-place, when the moon appeared from behind scurrying clouds, and she saw it was the body of a man. His arms hung limply by his sides and there was blood on his pale, distorted face. A sudden gust of wind blew off the hat of one of the men who were carrying the corpse, and soaring high, it finally

settled at Mary's feet. "Damn," the man who had lost his hat cried, "what's become of the blasted thing?"

"Never mind about your hat," the other man growled, "we've got to get rid of this body without delay. After we've burned it we can look for the hat. It can't be far away."

To Mary's relief they left the ruins. She waited till the sound of their footsteps died away in the distance and then, picking up the hat, ran to the inn.

Arriving there, white and scared, she panted out to the wondering customers: "There's been a murder at the abbey, a man killed, and this is the murderer's hat." She was about to give it to one of the customers, when she caught sight of a name inside it. It was that of her lover. The shock turned her brain. For some years she was to be seen wandering about the neighbourhood, and then she suddenly disappeared. What became of her was never known. Soon after her disappearance, a ghost believed to be her's, in the form of a White Lady, began to haunt the abbey ruins and, according to rumour, still at times haunts them, as do the ghosts of Mary's lover and his accomplice, who, through the finding of the hat, were traced, arrested and executed.

Phantom funerals are not uncommon, often they are prognosticators of death to those who see them. The most widely known phantom funeral in Yorkshire would seem to be that of Archibishop Scrope, who, as readers of history will know, came to a very tragic ending. The ghostly procession usually emerges from an old churchyard, somewhere between Naburn

and Fulford, and passing close to, or along, Hanley Lane, enters York and vanishes, when a short distance from the Minster, towards which it appears to be heading.

Among the many people who, from time to time, have testified to seeing the procession, was a York butcher.<sup>1</sup>

He was returning home one evening, accompanied by an apprentice, when, on approaching Hanley Lane, he saw, to his amazement, a coffin moving in mid-air, with no visible arms to support it, in the direction of York. Covered with black silk, fringed with white, it was evidently that of some well-to-do person.

Walking solemnly behind it was an ecclesiastic of high rank, in robes of lawn, his head bent over an open book, presumably a Bible or Prayer Book, and behind him, in twos, and also with heads bent, were a great number of men in old-world sombre costumes.

Not a sound accompanied the procession, and though the feet of all in it appeared to touch the ground, they awoke no echoes, and created not the slightest noise. As the procession drew nearer to the butcher, his dog and the sheep he was driving shrank in terror to the side of the road and huddled together against a wall.

Neither he nor the apprentice spoke, presumably they were too dumbfounded. They simply stood still, rooted to the ground, and watched the procession take the turning to York and disappear slowly round a bend in the lane. Waiting till it was well ahead of them, they then rather fearfully followed in its wake.

<sup>1</sup> According to P. J. Cummidge in his interesting work on Yorkshire, a local rumour.

## CHAPTER XI

### MORE YORKSHIRE GHOSTS

**K**NARESBOROUGH is associated with at least two notorious characters, namely, Mother Shipton, of prophecy renown, and Eugene Aram; and rumour has woven ghostly happenings round both.

What purported to be a history of Mother Shipton was a work written by Richard Head, published in 1648. In it he gives a by no means flattering description of the prophetess as a child. According to him, she was of indifferent height, with a very long head, and eyes which, although big and goggling, were sharp. Her nose was of "incredible length, having in it many crooks and turnings. It was adorned with many strange pimpls of diverse colours, red, blue and mixed, which, like vapours of brimstone, gave such a lustre to her affrighted spectators in the dead of night that one of them confessed in my hearing that her nose needed no other light to assist her in the performance of her duty."

Her cheeks were "black, swarthy and yellow jaundice," crumpled, shrivelled, hollow; her teeth, seen through them, stood out like ribs. Two that protruded resembled the tusks of a wild boar. Her head, which was on one side, rested on her right shoulder. Her legs were crooked and misshapen, the toes of her feet always turned to the left, so it was

hard for anyone to tell which way she was going Mr. Head professed to have got this description of her from an ancient manuscript, lent him by a gentleman who got it from a dissolved monastery. Though widely reputed to be a witch, Mother Shipton escaped the cruel fate of men and women accused of dabbling in the Black Art, and died in her bed of extreme old age, near Clifton, in Yorkshire. The following epitaph in Clifton church was erected to her memory :

Here lies she who never lied,  
Whose skill often has been tried,  
Her prophecies shall still survive,  
And ever keep her name alive.

Rumour, however, asserts that her skill and prophetic ability did not enable her to rest in her grave, for, soon after her death, her ghost, looking even more ugly than she did in her life-time, began to haunt her old home and Clifton churchyard.

She is said to have predicted many happenings, among others the suppression of the monasteries, Henry VIII's marriage with Anne Boleyn, the Marian persecutions and the accession of James I, relative to which event she said :

From the cold north  
Every evil shall come forth.

She is not, however, believed to have been responsible for the following famous lines, so popularly attributed to her :

Carriages without horses shall go,  
And accidents fill the world with woe.  
Around the world thoughts shall fly,  
In the twinkling of an eye.

The world upside down shall be,  
And gold shall be found at the root of a tree,  
Through hills man shall ride,  
And no horse be at his side.

Under water men shall walk,  
Shall ride, shall sleep, shall talk.  
In the air men shall be seen,  
In white, in black, in green.

Iron in the water shall float,  
As easily as a wooden boat.  
Gold shall be found and shown,  
In a land that's not now known.

Fire and water shall wonders do,  
England shall at last admit a Jew.  
The world to an end shall come,  
In eighteen hundred and eighty-one.

The author of these lines, which created nothing short of a panic in many homes, was, according to his own admission, a Mr. Charles Hindley, a journalist. In 1862 he published a work, professing to be the prophecies of Mother Shipton, and which contained the above verses. This work was very extensively read. Presumably, because his conscience pricked him for hoaxing the public, he wrote a letter to *Notes and Queries*, ten years later, in which he confessed the above prophetic verses were of his making and not Mother Shipton's.

He, doubtless, thought this was enough, that his letter would be widely read and commented on in the Press. In this, however, he was somewhat mistaken, for there were many who, knowing nothing about his letter, went on believing Mother Shipton, the famous prophetess, was the authoress of these particular verses.

Some of these people, at the close of 1880, in the firm conviction 1881 would see the destruction of this earth, gave away all they had. When 1882 dawned, and they found, to their dismay, they had been deceived and the world was still in existence, they wanted their money back. It is doubtful, however, if many of them got it. One case was very sad. An old, infirm gentleman in Brighton, under the belief the world would end in 1881, gave nearly everything he possessed to the young and pretty widow of his favourite nephew. When 1882 came, and he found the prophecy had not been fulfilled, he visited the widow, fully expecting she would receive him, as she had always hitherto done, kindly, and return him some, at least, of his money. To his surprise and utter consternation, however, she listened to his apologetic request scornfully and, with a mocking laugh, said : " Give you back your money, not I. I'm going to get married again shortly and shall need every penny of it. It serves you right for being such an old fool. Get away and don't come bothering here again." He went home, cruelly disillusioned and desperate, and rather than starve or go to the workhouse, he hanged himself.

The other notorious character to whom I alluded as being associated with Knaresborough, is Eugene Aram. Born in Yorkshire, he received a fair education, became a clerk in London, returned to Yorkshire, set up a school and married.<sup>1</sup> His marriage proved unhappy. Giving up the school he came to Knaresborough and after staying there for a time, he left his wife very abruptly, and went to London,

<sup>1</sup> See *Book of Days*, vol. ii.

where his knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and Latin enabled him to obtain the post of usher in a school in Piccadilly. An ardent learner, as well as teacher, he studied Chaldee, Arabic and Gaelic and, thus equipped, obtained a mastership in a fairly good school at Lynn in Norfolk. In 1758, some workmen, digging around St. Robert's cave at Knaresborough, found the remains of a man. The condition of the skull pointed to foul play. Fourteen years previously a shoemaker named Daniel Clark had mysteriously disappeared from the neighbourhood, and it was thought the skeleton was probably his. As Richard Houseman was known to have been the last man seen in the company of Clark, he was questioned.

Houseman, on examining the remains, declared they were not those of Clark, adding that he had reason to believe Clark's skeleton would be found, if the digging was renewed. This was done, and another skeleton was soon discovered. This, Houseman stated, was Clark's. He was now asked how he knew about Clark's skeleton being there, and his confused reply at once aroused suspicions, with the result he was arrested and charged with the murder of Clark. He appears to have been a sneaking, cowardly fellow, for he threw the onus of the crime on Aram. He said that he, Aram and Clark, being in need of money, committed a series of robberies in and around Knaresborough. Smuggling their booty to St. Robert's cave, they used to divide it there.

Aram and he, however, wanting more than their share, decided to murder Clark, and it was Aram who dealt the fatal blow.

After burying the body of their victim in the cave,

they separated. Houseman remained in or near Knaresborough, while Aram went to London. Aram, on being arrested, denied all knowledge of the murder but admitted participating in the robberies. He and Housman were tried, but the latter, having offered to turn King's evidence, was acquitted.

Aram defended himself and made a speech, remarkable for its shrewdness and oratory. In spite, however, of that he was found guilty. When in prison he tried to cut his throat, but was prevented in the nick of time. Prior to his execution on 16th August 1759, at Newgate, he made a partial confession of his guilt. It seems pretty certain that one, perhaps the chief, reason for his deserting his wife was that she knew him to be guilty.

After his death St. Robert's cave and St. Robert's chapel, which is not far from it, acquired the reputation for being haunted, not only by the ghost of Aram but by several other ghosts as well. One of them, described as having long hair and horrible eyes,<sup>1</sup> used to haunt not only Aram's cave and St. Robert's chapel but a spot named Busky or Bosky Dike, formerly very wild and lonely, but now built on.

According to the late Rev. J. Barmby<sup>2</sup> "there were plenty of ghosts or bogles about the village of Melsonby."

A headless white lady haunted a well there—for that reason called the Lady Well—the churchyard and the neighbouring fields and lanes.

Why so many ghosts should seem to be headless

<sup>1</sup> For description see *Yorkshire Legends & Traditions*, by Rev. Thos. Parkinson. Bush and Bosk are Yorkshire for bush.

<sup>2</sup> *Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties, Etc.*, by William Henderson.

is a mystery, since they are not infrequently those of people who commit suicide or die naturally. It may be that their heads are on their bodies but for some peculiar reason cannot be visualised. In the case of the Melsonby White Lady, tradition affirms that the material counterpart of the phantom was actually murdered, so, maybe, she was decapitated.

"White Ladies" are common enough but geese ghosts are much rarer.

A goose ghost is also said to haunt the vicinity of Melsonby churchyard and, at times, the churchyard itself.

And à propos of this the following story was told me some years ago :

A farmer, who lived in the neighbourhood of Melsonby, was driving along a lane, or road, leading to the village one night, when his horse suddenly shied with such abruptness that he was all but pitched out of the trap, and then bolted. As soon as he had got it, in some degree, under control, he looked around, to try and find out what had frightened it ; but he could only see a big white goose waddling solemnly along by the side of the trap. The fact, however, that it appeared to be moving slowly and yet was keeping pace with his horse, which was going very fast, filled him at first with astonishment and then with awe, as he recalled stories he had heard of the neighbourhood of Melsonby being haunted by a variety of ghosts. That this must be one of them he now felt sure, and his conviction grew stronger the nearer they approached the village.

On reaching the churchyard, great was his relief when the goose, making for it, entered it, by passing through the closed gate.

On another occasion, two well-known local poachers returning home one night, with rather less booty than usual, saw a fat goose waddling along the road in front of them.

"That's one of Farmer So-and-so's geese, I'll be bound," one of the poachers said.

"Let's bag it, he's got plenty more and will never miss it." His companion agreeing, they both stole up behind the goose and grabbed at it. But, lo and behold, their hands encountered nothing, because nothing was there. The goose had inexplicably vanished, melting, as it were, into fine air. The poachers did not look for any more quarry that night.

The old abbey of Meaux was long believed to be haunted by the ghost of a lady of Burstwick. During the siege of the abbey, the above lady volunteered to bring food to the starving inmates of the abbey, by means of a subterranean passage.<sup>1</sup>

She got some way along the passage when she died of fatigue, and afterwards a White Lady phantom, believed to be her's, haunted both the abbey and the neighbouring minster.

Near Rudston church there was, and perhaps still is, a monolith which, says tradition, the Devil hurled at the church to destroy it. The Devil must have been out of sorts that day, however, because his missile failed to reach its mark, and the church was not harmed. Nevertheless, rumour had it that a very terrifying spirit, believed to be either His Satanic Majesty or one of his numerous followers, was to be seen prowling around the churchyard and hiding behind the tombstones of those whose earthly careers had been none too virtuous.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to this is in *Folk-Lore of East Yorkshire*, by John Nicholson.

The Devil is also associated with two other Yorkshire cemeteries—he would seem to have a strange fascination for holy buildings—namely, North Otterington and Leake.

Tradition states that it was originally intended to build North Otterington church on a hill, close to Thornton-le-Moor, where an ancient village stood, but some invisible agency, believed to be the Devil, always carried away the stones during the night and transferred them to North Otterington. So, in the end, it was there the church was erected.

A similar story is told of Leake church. But for the interference of the invisible agency it would have been built on the summit of Borrowby Park instead of at Leake.

In Yorkshire and other northern counties there is still a belief in a ghost dog called the Padfoot. "He is described as about the size of a small donkey, black, with shaggy hair and large eyes like saucers."<sup>1</sup>

It follows people about or waylays them in lonely spots, sometimes rushing out on them from churchyards. The Rev. J. C. Atkinson of Danby, a friend of Mr. Henderson, regarded it as a precursor of death, and said it was sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, but it could always be known by the strange padding sound it made in the rear of people, and by its "roar," which was utterly unlike that of any known animal.

A woman carrier, whose daily journey was from Leeds to Swillington, was among the many stated to have often seen it. It had a particular fancy for a glen between Darlington and Houghton, and for a piece of waste land above a spring, locally known as

<sup>1</sup> *Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties.*

the Oxwells, between Wreghorn and Headingley Hill, near Leeds. It was reported to be seen occasionally hovering round certain churchyards in Leeds itself.

It has its counterpart in the "Trash" of Lancashire, the "Shuck" of Cambridgeshire, the "Barguest" or "Boguest" of Durham and Northumberland, and the "Gwyllgi" of Wales. Other countries have their particular dog phantoms, too.

Many lakes have their traditional associations with submerged towns or villages.

Semerwater is one of them. Because the inhabitants of a town on its shores were so wicked and ill-treated saintly visitors, its waters rose one day and submerged the town, drowning all who dwelt therein.

To this day, however, people living in the district declare they can sometimes see the buildings of the town clearly defined under the water, and can hear the sweet and plaintive chiming of bells.

Similar phenomena are said to be experienced at Gormire Lake, at the foot of Whitestone Cliff, near Thirsk.

In my reference to the hauntings at Whitby I omitted to mention the Whitby phantom coach, with six black horses, a black-garbed driver and two accompanying riders, also in black, carrying in their hands torches, each of which emits a lurid red glow. It is said to visit churchyards, in and around Whitby, after the burial of persons who have led a none too good life and drive away with their spirits. One story is as follows :<sup>1</sup>

The night after the funeral of a Whitby business man, who had amassed money by methods which,

<sup>1</sup> This story was vouched for to me by a friend of the eye-witnesses of the ghostly incident.

although actually within the law, were generally regarded as hard and unscrupulous, two of his acquaintances were passing the churchyard, where he had been interred, when they were surprised to see in the distance a lurid red glow, in the midst of which something big and black appeared to be moving. As it drew nearer, they saw the object that had puzzled them was a great hearse-like coach.

On either side of it rode two figures carrying torches, and on the box, his face hidden by a kind of cowl or hood, was a sinister-looking driver. Horses, driver and torch-bearers were all in black. Realising this must be the phantom coach, which they had always regarded as a joke, the now badly scared two spectators moved, as quickly as their trembling limbs would carry them, to one side of the road and, with bulging, fascinated eyes, watched the oncoming phenomena. Without a pause, the coach dashed through a closed gate into the churchyard beyond and abruptly halted by the side of the business man's grave. From out of the coach there then stepped four tall, sinister, hooded figures in black. The two spectators, impelled by an impulse they could not resist to approach close to the churchyard, now saw the four hooded phantoms bend over the grave and pull out of it a struggling human form, clad in what looked like a winding sheet. As the phantoms dragged their captive to the coach, his features were thrown into strong relief by the lurid glow of the torches, and the two spectators were immeasurably thrilled to recognise in the ghostly features thus displayed to them those of their recently deceased business acquaintance.

In spite of his piteous, mute appeals to them for

assistance and his renewed frantic struggles, he was bundled into the coach, which at once drove away.

The vicinity of Bridlington Quay is rich, if I may use such an expression, in ghosts. A headless horseman on a headless horse haunts, at intervals, fortunately long, certain of the roads and churchyards, chiefly those no longer used, between Hull and Bridlington. A headless woman is said to be seen seated, occasionally, on a churchyard wall near Prospect Hill, in the vicinity of Ruswarp, while rumour has it that a church door, not far from Hawsher, is every now and then opened by invisible hands. Lock and bolts make no difference, for however securely fastened the door has been left at night by those in charge of the church, it is found, in the morning, to be wide open.

## CHAPTER XII

### DURHAM AND LANCASHIRE CHURCH GHOSTS

**I**N the spring of 1873 a great sensation was caused in West Auckland, Durham, by reports of ghostly happenings in a local churchyard. In March of that year, at the Durham Assizes, Mary Anne Cotton was tried for poisoning her fourth husband and four children. She was suspected, on fairly damning evidence, of poisoning her three other husbands and twelve more children, twenty in all. At the time of her trial she was forty-two years of age. A Press photograph, taken just before her trial, depicts her as having rather a long face, hair parted down the centre and a somewhat thick nose. It is not a good-looking face, and yet there must have been something about her that made a strong appeal to men, otherwise she would not have been married so many times, or made a living on the streets. To a student of physiognomy her eyes would have spelt a warning, for they were hard, and had in their brown depths that curious metallic glitter one so often sees in the eyes of homicides. She was found guilty and executed. It was after her death that reports got into circulation of hauntings by the ghosts of various of her victims. They appeared in the churchyard where their bodies had been exhumed, and in the old rectory where their bodies

had been dissected.<sup>1</sup> A postman named Barker, returning home from a social gathering late in the evening of the day of the execution, was passing the old rectory,<sup>2</sup> when a figure, resembling a dead child in a shroud, emerged from the aforesaid churchyard and glided, rather than walked, to his side. There was something so gruesome and unearthly about the apparition that the postman, terrified almost out of his wits, took to his heels. No matter, however, how fast he ran he could not escape from the ghost, which kept up with him without seeming to increase its pace.

On reaching the cottage where he lived, he rushed in, and slamming the door to, locked and bolted it. The night was very still, from afar off came the wailings of night birds and the mournful howling of dogs, nothing more. Then came a sound which, magnified multifold amid the silence, made him stand still and listen against his will, his heart throbbing violently.

It was the clicking of the garden gate. He stared in fearful anticipation at the door, frantically hoping it would keep the *THING* out. It did not, for the shrouded figure, passing through it as easily as if it had not been there, glided towards him.

With a yell that brought his wife tumbling out of bed, he tore upstairs. The figure followed him. He burst into his bedroom and locked the door.

The *Thing* did not come after him, he heard it go into the adjoining bedroom, where his infant child slept. Too terrified to think of anything but their own safety, he and his wife stole, on tiptoe, downstairs and barricaded themselves in the parlour.

<sup>1</sup> See *Illustrated Police News*, 5th April 1873.

<sup>2</sup> No longer, I understand, in existence.

For a long time they heard footsteps pacing to and fro overhead and then a terrific crash, which so panicked them that they fled out of the cottage to the house of one of their neighbours. There they soon, however, became alarmed for the safety of their child, but were far too frightened to return to the cottage. A young man, who did not believe in ghosts, said he would bring their child to them, but when he got to the cottage and saw the shrouded figure descending the stairs, his scepticism abruptly vanished and he ran away in terror. Finally an old woman, who had lived in a haunted house and had seen more than one ghost, went to the cottage and rescued the infant.

Asked if she was not afraid, she said : " In a way, yes, though I knew the ghost could not harm me. Poor thing, it was very lonely in the cold, dark churchyard and longed for a little life and company. I did my best to comfort it, and it won't bother you again."

What she prophesied came true.

The little shrouded figure, so pathetic with its small wan face, did not come to the Barker's home again. Barker, however, was so afraid of seeing it that nothing would induce him to venture near the cemetery or old rectory again after dusk.

The hauntings by other of the ghosts went on for some time and then abruptly ceased, to break out again at a later date, and, if there is any truth in rumour, they have not entirely ceased.

In the dead of night a phantom coach, with headless driver and horses, periodically whirls by country rectories and churches in the vicinity of Durham on its way to Old Langley Hall.

Some years ago certain of the streets and churchyards in Preston were said to be haunted by two ghosts, one a female phantom in white, the other a dog.

Both were headless.<sup>1</sup> Attempts were made to lay them in Walton churchyard, but they are said to have only succeeded temporarily, the hauntings recurring after some months.

I have no information regarding the last appearance of the ghosts.

Another very alarming Lancashire haunting occurred in the autumn of 1881.

A postman, who was on his round with letters, was going along a very lonely lane near Garstang, when a tall figure, in a winding sheet, suddenly emerged from the gloom of the trees and hedge and confronted him. The moonlight shining on it revealed a ghostly death's head, which grinned evilly.

Dropping his letters the postman fled, and the skeleton ghost pursued him with outstretched arms.<sup>2</sup> He could hear it clicking along behind him till he came to a church, when the sounds ceased. Summoning up courage he glanced round and saw it entering the churchyard, with long strides.

As he refused to go that way again he was transferred to another locality.

A woman, who also saw the ghost, was so frightened that she was ill for weeks afterwards. Apparently there was nothing known to account for the haunting.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to the hauntings may be seen in Hardwicke's *Traditions, Superstitions and Folk-Lore*.

<sup>2</sup> See *Illustrated Police News*, 1881.

Referring to Yorkshire again, the neighbourhood of Rokeby in Teesdale was reputed, some years ago, to be very much haunted. A ghost, known as the Mortham "dobby," and supposed to be that of the wife of a Lord of Rokeby, who was murdered either by her husband or by someone else who knew her, used to emerge nightly from Mortham Tower, walk through the old churchyard, occasionally entering the church itself, and disappear always at the same spot, namely, near the Dairy Bridge. The Vicar of Rokeby and several of the local clergy went through the ceremony of laying the "dobby," and congratulated themselves on having enticed it into a bottle, which they sealed and threw into a pool under Dairy Bridge. Maybe they had not been earnest enough in their prayers, or had not said the right ones, or had not sealed the bottle properly, but the "dobby" was said to be soon at its old tricks again and, if rumour asserts rightly, it is still periodically haunting.

On the south side exterior of the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Barnard Castle, is a symbol of death, namely, a skeleton with a scythe, and à propos of this the following story was told me by a Mrs. Hunt, after I had been speaking, in pre-War days, at the London Pioneer Club.

"My grandfather, a retired army officer, used to live near Barnard Castle," Mrs. Hunt said. "While home on leave, one summer morning, he was passing St. Mary the Virgin's, when something whizzed past him. It was a raven. Looking in the direction whence it had come, his eyes lighted on the symbol of death on the church wall, and, as he looked at it, he saw the scythe move. Thinking there

was something wrong with his sight, he rubbed his eyes and looked again. The scythe was still moving, and he could feel the Figure of Death staring at him intently from its cavernous, crafty eyes. One of his men friends, chancing to see him gazing at the church, asked him what he was looking at, and the moment he spoke the scythe became stationary and the sensation of being scrutinised ceased. The following day his father died suddenly. Happening, some weeks later, to mention the incident to an old inhabitant of Barnard Castle, the latter said : ‘ That’s odd, because it recalls to my mind something my mother once told me. She said there was a tradition in connection with St. Mary’s, to this effect, that if a raven was seen flying from the figure of Death and the scythe moved, it would mean the death either of the person who witnessed the phenomena or of someone closely associated with him.’ ”

Mrs. Hunt also told me of an experience she and a friend once had in a Liverpool church. I could not persuade her to name the church, she would only say it was near Chapel Street.

She and her friend were visiting it one morning when they received something in the nature of a shock. Staring down at them from the pulpit was a clergyman. He was in a half-standing, half-sitting posture, his elbows on the front of the pulpit and his chin in his cupped hands. There was something so unearthly in his very white face and glittering dark eyes that they were horribly thrilled, but could not remove their gaze, being spellbound. The verger calling out to someone broke the spell, and they turned their heads in his direction ; when, obeying an irresistible impulse, they looked again

at the pulpit, the white-faced clergyman was no longer there. He had disappeared altogether. On leaving the church Mrs. Hunt inquired of the verger who the very peculiar-looking parson was. They described him, and the verger, looking very relieved, said : “ If you promise not to say a word I will tell you something. Believe me or believe me not, what you saw was no living man but a ghost. Up to now I thought I was the only person who had seen it, and that made me wonder if I was dreaming, or if there was something wrong with my brain. Since, however, you have both seen it too, I know I am all right. It frequently appears at this particular hour, on this particular day of the week, always in the pulpit, in the attitude you describe. As it resembles no parson I have seen, and I have been here many years, I can only conclude it is either the ghost of someone formerly connected with this church or a very evil spirit, and from its expression I rather incline to the latter theory.”

## CHAPTER XIII

## MORE NORTH COUNTRY HAUNTINGS

ONE summer evening, about the middle of the last century, a gentleman who was on a visit to friends in Blackburn was examining the remains of the Roman encampment on Mellor Moor, when he saw a dwarf-like man, in hunting costume of an old-world style, that is to say in top boots, spurs, green jacket and red, hairy cap, run briskly across the moor for some distance, leap over a low stone wall, and disappear very mysteriously.

Struck with the strangeness of the occurrence, he mentioned it to his friends, who asked him to point out the spot where the hunter had vanished. When they saw the spot they at once exclaimed : " Oh, it is here where the subterranean city is believed to be. According to tradition, there stood years ago on this moor a city that was swallowed up in an earthquake, and people to this day declare that if they kneel down here on very still nights, and listen intently, they can hear the mournful chiming of the buried church bells." <sup>1</sup>

Beneath the eastern gable of the chancel in Brindle church, Lancashire, there is, or was, a few years ago a large stone coffin with a cavity for a head. Its history is unknown ; but in the wall, just above it, is an indentation resembling a foot, about which tradition has woven a story.

<sup>1</sup> See *Lancashire Folk-Lore*, by J. Harland and T. T. Wilkinson.

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One day, during the time of religious persecution in England, a Roman Catholic priest or layman was engaged, in the church, in a dispute with a Protestant. From words they almost came to blows, and, in the heat of his ardour, the Roman Catholic exclaimed : " If the doctrine I am upholding be not true, may my foot sink right into this stone," and raising one of his feet he stamped on the stone floor, which instantly softened, so that the imprint of his boot remained there ever afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

When I was a boy I asked my godfather, the Rev. T. G. Luckock,<sup>2</sup> then living in Clevedon, Somerset, if he believed in ghosts, and he said : " Though I have never seen or heard one myself I can't help believing in them, because several people I know, whose veracity is unquestionable, have declared to me they have seen them." On my pressing him to tell me what his friends had seen, he said : " I can tell you what two of them said they saw. They were visiting Manchester Cathedral one day, soon after it had been raised to the dignity of a cathedral (it had formerly been the old parish church), when their attention was attracted by a tall lady in sombre mourning, who was standing in the nave, gazing intently at the ceiling. Something about her struck them both as very familiar. As if knowing they were staring at her, she suddenly turned and looked at them .

" Why, good heavens ! " one of them exclaimed, " It's Fanny ! " (Fanny was his sister.) " What on earth can she be doing in Manchester, and how thin and white she is." On his approaching the

<sup>1</sup> See *Lancashire Folk-Lore*.

<sup>2</sup> Formerly Vicar of Emmanuel Church, Clifton, Bristol.

lady, with the object of speaking to her, she smiled very sadly at him and walking in the direction of the Lady chapel abruptly vanished from view. My friends then knew," Mr. Luckock concluded "that what they had seen was a spirit and were full of apprehension regarding Fanny. And their worst fears were soon realised, for Fanny's brother received a letter the following day, saying she had met with a fatal accident, just about the time they had seen her wraith in the cathedral.

Mr. Luckock went on to tell me the experience another friend of his had had in St. Nicholas' church, Newcastle, before it was raised to the rank of cathedral. He was looking at the monument of the Crusader one day when he heard a curious clanking noise in his rear. Wondering what caused it, he turned, and walking a few paces was just in time to see a tall, shadowy figure in armour disappear behind a pillar. Though a trifle startled, for he was almost alone in the church, the only other people in it being the verger and two elderly ladies, who were standing together, whispering, at the far end of the building, he ran to the pillar and looked behind it. There was no one there, no sign of the mail-clad figure anywhere. As he stood peering around, however, there was a loud thud and clatter close to him, as if some heavy body had fallen or been dashed on the stone flooring. This scared him so, for he could see nothing to account for the noise, that he made for the three whisperers and told them what had happened. The ladies were very frightened, and the verger did not look any too comfortable, but he merely said : " Well, sir, I have occasionally seen and heard queer things in this old

building, but I have never told anyone. I dare not, for, if I did, members of the congregations might stay away and I should run the risk of losing my job." These were the only two cases of church hauntings Mr. Luckock told me, and I had considerable difficulty in extracting them from him, as the subject of ghosts, he informed me, was one he did not care to discuss.

A curious phenomenon occurred at a Preston church in the year 1864.

When, in 1839, the Rev. J. Clark came to Christ Church, Preston, as its first incumbent, he planted ivy, and it grew so extensively that, in the course of a few years, it covered the frontage of the two towers of the church. In 1864 Mr. Clark preached his farewell sermon and said good-bye to a congregation that was very much attached to him. Directly after he had gone, all the ivy he had planted twenty-five years previously fell off the front of the church, and this was looked upon as so mysterious, for there was no apparent natural cause to account for it, that it was commented on in the contemporary Press.<sup>1</sup>

Referring back to Yorkshire there is, or was, in Fors Abbey a narrow passage reputed to be haunted by the ghosts of monks, who showed their dislike at having their one time premises utilised by strangers by invariably blowing out lights. If anyone ventured to carry a lighted lamp or candle down this passage, there would be a little puff, made by a close-at-hand invisible presence, and out would go the light, to the terror of the bearer of it, who was left quaking and shaking in the dark.

Northumberland boasts of several very old haunt-

<sup>1</sup> *News of the World*, 21st August 1864.

ings, the best known of which is probably that of Lindisfarne Abbey. The ruins stand on the mainland, at the extremity of the sandy track leading to Holy Island. Both abbey and island are said to be haunted by the phantom of St. Cuthbert,<sup>1</sup> who at one time was Bishop of Lindisfarne. On dark and gloomy nights, when the waves rise high and the wind roars, the spirit of St. Cuthbert sits, veiled in mist, on a fragment of rock, on the shore of Holy Island, or on a stone in the abbey ruins. The sound of hammering, attributed to him, can be heard at times, both on shore and out at sea. Sir Walter Scott refers to the haunting thus :

On a rock by Lindisfarne,  
St. Cuthbert sits, and toils to frame  
The sea-born beads that bear his name ;  
Such tales had Whitby's fishers told,  
And said they might his shape behold,  
    And hear his anvil sound ;  
A deafening clang—a huge, dim form,  
Seen but, and heard, when gathering storm  
    And night were closing round.

Another ghost, so a correspondent of mine informed me, that used to haunt the abbey ruins, was that of a large, white hound, that sometimes startled visitors by emerging from behind pillars, bounding in front of them and disappearing in the most inexplicable manner.

Its last-known appearance was during the Boer War of 1899-1902.

Referring again to Lancashire, tradition asserts that near Blackpool, a mile or two out at sea, there was once the village of Kilmigrol.<sup>2</sup> Owing to the

<sup>1</sup> See *Picturesque England*.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Ghost World*, by T. Dyer.

encroaching of the sea it had to be abandoned, but to this day, on certain nights in the year, fishermen, passing over the spot where it lies, can clearly hear the ghostly chiming of its old church bells.

Strange stories have been in circulation, from time to time, concerning the ruins of Seaton Delaval Castle and chapel.<sup>1</sup> Formerly the abode of a race that was famed for its hospitality and gay mode of living, what is now left of the castle is the home of bats and night birds.

The Delavals were among the numerous families said to have come over with the Conqueror. One of the best known of them was George Delaval, Rear-Admiral of the Blue and Vice-Admiral of the Red, who gained renown for the part he played in the defeat of the French, off Cape Barfleur, in May 1692.

It was during the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century that Seaton Delaval became the centre of local scandal and gossip. Lord Delaval constantly had large house parties and magnificent fêtes in the castle grounds, which "became in truth a perfect fairyland of light and beauty and music."<sup>2</sup> The majority of those who participated in these revelries were the giddy, frivolous and abandoned of both sexes. Lord Delaval's daughters, who were extremely beautiful, were generally the ringleaders in all kinds of frolics and the inventors of innumerable contrivances for carrying into effect practical jokes, sometimes of a dangerous nature.

"Beds were suspended by pulleys over trap-

<sup>1</sup> This refers to some years ago. I do not know if any part of the ruins still remain.

<sup>2</sup> See *Visits to Remarkable Places*, by William Howitt.

doors, so that when guests had retired after a carouse, and were just dropping asleep, they were rapidly let down into a cold bath, and awoke in consternation, finding themselves floundering in darkness and cold water. Another contrivance was that of partitions between sleeping rooms, which could be suddenly hoisted up into the ceiling by pulleys, so that when ladies and gentlemen were retiring to rest, and had doffed all their finery of wigs and hoop-petticoats, they were in a moment astonished to see the walls of their rooms disappear, and to find themselves in a miscellaneous assembly of the oddest and most embarrassing description."

One of the daughters of Lord Delaval was the lovely Lady Tyrconnell, "who had hair of such rich luxuriance, that when she rode it floated on the saddle."

She was said to be the mistress of the Duke of York, while her husband, who seems to have taken up his abode at Seaton Delaval, was rumoured to keep several women. Lady Tyrconnell and her sisters were clever amateur actresses, and on one occasion the whole Delaval family acted on the boards of Drury Lane, by permission of David Garrick.

Foote was a constant visitor at the castle, and he and the Earl's brother, Sir Frances Delaval, used to get up sports and shows, to which the whole countryside were invited. Among the contests were an ass race, a puppet exhibition, a grinning match, a shift race by women and a sack race.

The shift races created a great scandal in the neighbourhood, especially among the Nonconformists, who spoke with bated breath of the sinful

going-ons at the castle, and when the Delavals squandered all their wealth away and the castle was finally abandoned to rats and owls, it was looked upon by chapel-goers as a just punishment for sin.

It was after the castle had been forsaken that rumours of ghostly happenings there first got abroad.<sup>1</sup> People passing through the grounds at night spoke of hearing sounds of music and the tapping of high heels on wooden floors proceeding from the bare, dark rooms and hall, and of seeing eerie lights of a leadenish blue in the little chapel adjoining the main building. Great trees surrounded the chapel, and some of them were rumoured to take on shapes, in the night-time, of the most phantastic and terrifying description, but one of the most alarming of the phenomena, reported to haunt the chapel itself, was a headless dog that was occasionally to be seen crouching under a gloomy archway or gliding over the shadow-laden stone floor.

<sup>1</sup> For reference to the haunting see *The Ghost World*.

## CHAPTER XIV

## HAUNTED CHURCHES IN THE EASTERN COUNTIES

**A**LDEBURGH and Felixstowe have their traditions of submerged churches. Centuries ago old Aldeburgh and old Felixstowe are said to have been claimed by the encroaching sea, and people passing over the spots where they respectively lie can still hear, on certain nights in the year, the ghostly chiming of their ancient bells.

The ruined abbey of Leiston and an old cemetery near Woodbridge are rumoured to be periodically haunted by an apparition locally called "Galley Trot,"<sup>1</sup> which would seem to be a counterpart of the Shuck, Trash and Gwyllgi.

Two well-known Suffolk ghosts are those of Widow Shawe and Mrs. Short, the "Queen of Hell." Both these ghosts haunt the neighbourhood of Boulge.

The Widow Shawe is said to have cut her throat, and her ghost seems to have a peculiar fascination for churchyards, in which it is sometimes seen on wild, stormy nights, sitting serenely in a winding-sheet.

Mrs. Short murdered a man at Boulge Hall, about the 'twenties of the last century, and a stain, said to be of his blood, is on the floor of the room in which he was killed.

Not only is her ghost rumoured to have haunted

<sup>1</sup> For allusion to this phenomenon see Hone's *Everyday Book*, vol. i.

the Hall for some time, pulling the bedclothes off sleepers and performing many other unkind and alarming antics, but it is said, still at times, to haunt the lanes and roads in the vicinity of Boulge. In the dead of night a carriage with headless horses and driver careers about the countryside, dashing across churchyards and old cemeteries, and every now and then a silk-clad figure is seen peering out of the window. It is that of the Queen of Hell, and very hellish she looks, with her glittering dark eyes and white, evil face.<sup>1</sup>

Many localities in Norfolk and Suffolk are said to be haunted by phantom coaches, and one or two by phantom motor cars. There was a regular epidemic of hauntings by phantom cars in England a few years ago, Warwickshire, Sussex, Cheshire and Berkshire being among the victimised counties.

Animal ghosts are far from uncommon in the Eastern Counties. The immediate vicinity of Tupholme Priory and several churchyards in the neighbourhood of Wrawly and Brigg were once, respectively, haunted by a phantom white calf. The latter ghost was credited with luring people into pools and streams and bringing about ruptures between husbands and wives, and parents and their children.

A very remarkable case of haunting, if such it could strictly be termed, occurred some years ago at Northorpe.<sup>2</sup> There are many reputed cases of wer-wolves, wer-tigers, jaguars and fox-women, but I have seldom heard of a case of a wer-dog; yet there is said to have been one at Northorpe. During the

<sup>1</sup> See reference to this ghost in *County Folk-Lore of Suffolk*, published in 1893.

<sup>2</sup> See *Notes and Queries*, vol. ii. 336.

last century there was living in Northorpe an old man, whom the villagers declared was a wizard. He lived in an isolated cottage, and people said that often, when they passed it at night, they used to hear him muttering and singing, and see strange shadows on the light window blinds. It was not, however, until a strange black dog was seen in fields, worrying sheep and cattle, that they began to suspect the wizard was a wer-dog. Their suspicions were verified when a farmer, walking by the churchyard one evening, saw a sinister-looking black dog emerge from behind a tombstone and jump over the gate. He followed it into a field where some cattle were grazing. No sooner did it see the cattle than it rushed furiously at them. Shouting, the farmer ran to rescue the cows, and lo and behold, right before his eyes, the dog turned into the village-reputed wizard. Before long the whole neighbourhood heard of it and took good care to let the wizard know. In fact the villagers made it so hot for him that he disappeared from the neighbourhood, and his ultimate fate was a mystery.

The churchyard of Barnoldby-le-Beck is said to have been haunted for some time by a ghost in the form of a small black horse, styled locally "the shag-foal." It used to sit on its haunches like a dog and, throwing back its head, emit the most unearthly cries. Occasionally it would be seen, too, in the lanes and fields near the village.

Similar phantoms are reported to have haunted the churchyards and neighbourhoods of Freiston, Kirton-in-Lindsey and Roxby.

The haunting at Freiston (said to still occur periodically) is believed to have originated in a

murder committed many years ago in the near proximity of the church. It is curious that scenes of murders are sometimes haunted by phantoms in the form of animals, but it certainly is so.

Some believe that the form in which spirits appear depends on the life they led when in the material body. Though such a belief may seem likely in some instances, there is much to discountenance it in the majority of cases. What manner of living would, for example, lead to a deceased person appearing in the guise of a headless dog or shaggy foal? What appears to me to be a more likely theory is that certain spirits, quite apart from humans or earth-animals, are, for some curious reason, drawn to spots where tragedies have taken place and blood has been shed.

About the 'seventies of the last century the parish of Grayingham, particularly the immediate vicinity of the churchyard, was haunted by a shaggy, dog-shaped phantom locally dubbed "Hairy Jack."

More startling than Hairy Jack, however, is the ghost said, even now at times, to haunt the site of an ancient church in Ravendale, Lincolnshire.

A girl, belonging to a village near Ravendale, made an assignation to meet her lover one night at the ruins of this old church. It was a fine though somewhat misty night and, on reaching the ruins, she saw a man sitting on a stone, with his back towards her. Thinking it was her lover, she stole up behind him and was about to throw her arms round his neck when, to her horror, she discovered he had no neck. Some minutes later her lover

arrived and found her lying by the stone in a dead faint. What she had thought was him was the Ravendale headless phantom that has for many years haunted the old church ruins.

On another occasion, so the story goes, a blacksmith and two of his cronies were returning home one night from a fair. On their approaching old Ravendale church, a figure suddenly emerged from the ruins and beckoned to them. The moon appearing at that moment from behind a bank of clouds revealed the terrifying fact that, instead of having its head on its shoulders, surely the orthodox position for most heads, the figure was carrying it under one arm. Surrounded by a gruesome light, it presented such a truly ghostly and satanic appearance that the blacksmith's companions took to their heels. The blacksmith would have followed their example but for an injured foot, which prevented him running or doing more than merely hobble.

Compelled to remain where he was, he saw the terrible head open its mouth and heard it call out in harsh, unearthly tones : "Peter Gover to-day fortnight at noon, and you, George Hall, to-day month at five o'clock in the afternoon, as for you, William Smith," and the head grinned malevolently at the quaking blacksmith, "you were born penniless, you will die penniless." Having uttered these words, the phantom glided away and was lost to sight amid the gloom and shadows of the building.

Its prophetic utterances came true. Peter Gover died exactly a fortnight later at noon, and George Hall four weeks later, at five o'clock in the afternoon, while William Smith took to drink, lost all his business and ended a pauper in the county workhouse.

The Rev. F. G. Lee, D.D., the well-known writer of works dealing with the superphysical, narrates in one of his books<sup>1</sup> an extraordinary case of antipathy in a church after death. Unfortunately, however, he does not give the name of the locality, but only says it was somewhere in Lincolnshire.

Living there, about the middle of the eighteenth century, was an old squire who suffered a dreadful loss when his wife and only child died within a year of one another. Their bodies were deposited in the family vault of the parish church "amid the tears and regrets of the villagers by whom they were much and deservedly beloved."

For years the squire had had no intercourse with his brother, between whom and the squire's wife there had been a bitter feud.

When the squire, after his double bereavement, became almost heart-broken the local parson, who had been his friend for fifty years, effected a reconciliation between the brothers, and the younger of them was invited to live at the Hall, on the condition that he should never mention the name of his deceased sister-in-law.

A year passed. The squire was beginning to become more reconciled to his great loss and to take part again in the social activities of the neighbourhood, when an epidemic broke out in the village. Among the many victims was the squire's brother. When he was on his death-bed, the village parson came to see him and exhorted him to repent of any evil he might have done and to forgive all those he believed had injured him or borne him ill-

<sup>1</sup> See *Glimpses in the Twilight*, p. 150.

will. He, the parson, alluded very cautiously to the squire's deceased wife. The moment he mentioned her name there was a sudden change in the sick man. Gone at once was his apathy, and, though a few minutes before apparently past the power of speech, he now broke out into fierce imprecations, and by a supreme effort, raising himself upright in the bed, he exclaimed : "I know that I am dying, but mark my last words : if, when I am dead, you dare to bury me in the same vault with that accursed woman, the living as well as the dead shall hear of me."

He fell back with a frightful imprecation on his lips, and expired.

The horror-stricken parson thinking it prudent to keep the squire in ignorance of his brother's last hours, did not mention to anyone that death-bed utterance, and in the hope that nothing would come of it, he submitted to the body of the deceased being placed next to the coffins of the squire's wife and daughter in the family vault at the church.

That night cottagers living near the churchyard were disturbed by blood-curdling shrieks and groans proceeding from the vault. It sounded as if a number of people were engaged in a deadly combat. In the morning the rector, who had been informed of the nocturnal happenings, thought it best under the circumstances to disclose to the squire the last fearful words and threats of his brother, and to suggest the opening of the family vault.

To this the squire, who was greatly shocked, reluctantly consented.

On the rector and certain people chosen by him

entering the vault an amazing scene met their eyes.

"The coffins of the squire's lady and daughter were lying in a far corner of the vault, the young girl's coffin across her mother's as if to protect it. Close to them, standing, not as deposited, but erect and menacing, was the coffin of the squire's brother, so recently and decorously placed upon black trestles."

Examination of the vault proving it had not been opened since the body of the squire's brother had been deposited in it, and that it could not have been opened without the knowledge of the rector, the displacement of the coffins was regarded as an inexplicable and alarming mystery.

Under the superintendence of the rector and persons carefully selected by him the coffins were restored to their original positions and the vault once again sealed. At night the noises began again, and this time were worse than before. The sound of blows was followed by shrieks of pain and a frightful contention of struggling people. The villagers, who were keeping watch outside the church to prevent any trickery, were so terrified that they huddled as close to one another as possible.

News of the strange occurrences soon got widely spread, and savants from Lincoln, who sneered at anything superphysical, suggested an explosion of gas, caused by foul air, might have caused the displacement of the coffins.

At their request the squire had large ventilators constructed in the vault, but this made no difference, the sounds at night still continued, and it was not until he had the coffins of his wife and

brother separated from one another by a strong brick wall that the nocturnal disturbances entirely ceased.<sup>1</sup>

Once again a reference to St. Mark's Eve, this time in connection with Lincolnshire.

In the Lansdowne MSS.<sup>2</sup> in the British Museum, No. 207 (c) fol. 356, there is an account of a vigil held on St. Mark's Eve, 1634, by two men of Burton, Lincolnshire, in the porch of Burton parish church, to test the popular belief that on this particular night of the year the phantoms of those local persons destined to die within a year will be seen by watchers, "who have first performed the usual ceremonies and superstitions, to enter certain churches, the parish church of Burton being one of them."

The two men in question, having performed the preliminaries required for the occasion (it is not stated in the MSS. what those preliminaries were), found themselves, about eleven o'clock, seated in the church porch. As the minutes sped by and nothing happened they grew weary. Then, suddenly, as the church clock was solemnly booming the witching hour, "the moon was obscured and in the darkness appeared a light as if from torches; the minister of the parish advanced towards the porch, with a book in his hand, followed by a person in a winding sheet, whom the watchers recognised as one of their neighbours. The church doors opened, the spectres entered and the doors closed. A muttering was heard, like the rattling of bones, and noise of earth, as if of filling up a grave. There was a sudden silence,

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Lee obtained the account of these remarkable happenings from an eighteenth century MS. in the possession of Mrs. Cracroft-Amcott of Hackthorne, Lincolnshire.

<sup>2</sup> See *Predictions Realized*, by John Tombs, F.S.A.

and the curate appeared again with another of their neighbours in a winding sheet; and even a third, fourth and fifth, attended as the first. All having passed, the moon shone brightly as before, and the sky became serene.

Next day the watchers kept within doors, being both ill from the fright on the previous night. They compared their notes of the circumstances; three of the spectres they well knew to resemble three of their neighbours; but to the fourth (which seemed like an infant), and to the fifth (like an old man) they could not trace any resemblance. After this they confidently reported what they had done and seen; and their three neighbours, whom they had recognised, died soon after. Next, a woman in the parish was delivered of a child which died also; so that there wanted but one, the old man, to complete the prediction. This came to pass as follows: in the winter, about the middle of January, began a sharp and long frost, during which some of Sir John Munson's friends in Cheshire, having occasion to communicate with him, despatched a messenger on foot with letters to him. This man journeying, in bitter cold weather, over the Derbyshire mountains, had nearly perished, but arrived at Burton with his letters, where, within a day or two, he died; the watchers in the church porch, having previously seen him, identified him and declared that he would die before he returned."

In Lincoln cathedral there is a very fine circular transept window, concerning which there is a tragic story. An apprentice is said to have made it in the absence of his master, who, when he saw how much more talented he—the apprentice—was than himself,

leaped to his death from the gallery beneath his own boasted chef d'œuvre. The stains of his blood are said to be still visible on the spot where he fell, and his ghost is rumoured to haunt, periodically, the gallery and immediate site of his death.

## CHAPTER XV

HAUNTED CHURCHES IN THE SOUTH  
OF ENGLAND

KENT would seem to have many haunted houses and outdoor places but very few haunted churches. Indeed, I have only been able to hear of one Kentish place of worship rumoured to possess a ghost, and that is Canterbury cathedral.

On the hard Caen stone-pavement in front of the wall where Becket fell, struck down by the blows of his four murderers, a stain, said to be that of his blood, was long pointed out to visitors, who were informed that no amount of washing and scrubbing had sufficed to eliminate it. This was believed to be due to superphysical agency. One of the ghosts rumoured to haunt the building is that of Joan of Navarre, second wife of Henry IV, who was buried in the cathedral. She married first the Duke of Bretagne, and, after his death, Henry IV. She was imprisoned by her stepson, Henry V, on a charge of witchcraft, but released by him just before he died. She was popularly believed to dabble in the Black Art in the old palace at Havering-atte-Bower and in sundry other places, and for that reason, it was said, her soul would remain earth-bound after her demise. And, according to report, this was actually so, for soon after her death a ghost supposed to be hers began to haunt both Havering-atte-Bower,

where she passed away, and the precincts of Canterbury cathedral.

Other ghosts, apparently unidentified, are stated to haunt the cathedral too.

Coming to Dorset, a strange dream was once experienced in connection with Lyme-Regis.<sup>1</sup> On the night of the 17th of February 1836, Captain Clarke, in his schooner *Julia Hallock*, which was frozen up in the Bay of Fundy, dreamed he was standing by the side of a road in Lyme-Regis, Dorset, watching a funeral procession approach him. He took note of the leading people in the procession, observed who were the pall-bearers and mourners, in what order they walked, and regarded intently the officiating clergyman. On the procession treading solemnly past him he joined it.

The weather was stormy and the ground so wet, after a heavy rain, that he could hear the squishing of the mourners' feet in the slush. Periodically there were gusts of wind, and during one of them the pall was blown partly off the coffin. On nearing the centre of the town a familiar sight greeted his eyes. It was the parish church which he had attended regularly as a boy. He had a feeling that the funeral was of someone closely related to him and fully expected the procession would make for that part of the parish churchyard where his family graves were situated. To his surprise, however, the procession did not proceed thither, but to quite another part of the churchyard. Arriving there, he found himself staring down into the open grave, which was partially filled with water, and his eyes became riveted on two drowned field-mice floating

<sup>1</sup> See *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, by Dale Owen.

on the water. Curiously, the actual service made no impression on him. He thought, when it was over, that he conversed with his mother, who told him the morning had been so wild and stormy that the funeral, originally appointed for ten o'clock, had had to be deferred till four in the afternoon. He remarked, in reply, it was fortunate, because had the funeral taken place in the morning he could not have attended it; and with his concluding words he awoke.

The dream made such a deep impression on him that he carefully noted the date of it. Some time afterwards he received the news of his grandmother's death. She had been buried the same day on which he, in North America, had dreamed he attended the funeral.

Four years later, he visited Lyme-Regis and found every detail of his dream minutely corresponded with the reality.

The clergyman, pall-bearers and mourners were the same he had noted in his dream. The funeral had been arranged for ten o'clock in the morning, but, in consequence of the stormy weather, had been put off till four in the afternoon.

His mother told him she distinctly recollects the high wind blowing the pall partially off the coffin as the procession approached the parish church. She also informed him that his grandmother, when on her death-bed, expressed a desire not to be buried in the spot where other members of the family had been buried, but in a place, some distance away, which she had carefully selected some time previously.

Captain Clarke, without any indication from

anyone, and without the slightest hesitation, proceeded at once to her grave.

Finally, on comparing notes with the old sexton, it appeared that the heavy rain on the day of the funeral had partially filled the grave, and that there were actually found in it two drowned field-mice. "This last incident," Mr. Dale Owen comments, "even if there were no other, might suffice to preclude all idea of accidental coincidence."

Captain Clarke, who narrated the account of his dream to Mr. Dale Owen, gave permission for his name to be published, in attestation of the truth of his extraordinary experience.

And yet it, his dream, was by no means without parallels ; to confirm this, one has only to read Dr. Ambergcrombie's *Intellectual Powers*, Sir Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, Richard Baxter's *The Certainty of the World of Spirits*, Dr. Paul Joire's *Psychical and Supernatural Phenomena*, Dr. du Prel's *Experimental Psychology*, and the Annals of the various more reputable societies for psychical research.

Hampreston church near Wimborne is thought by some people to be haunted.

A native of Dorset told me that sometimes, when passing the church at night, the windows appeared to be illuminated from within, but he thought this might possibly be due to a trick of the moonlight.

Several other churches in the neighbourhood exhibit, at times, similar phenomena.

Like Norfolk and some other English counties, Dorset has its phantom coaches, the best known of which is the Turbeville coach, seen, happily, only

by those who have Turbeville blood in their veins. A less exclusive ghost coach is the one rumoured to haunt the vicinity of Stoke Abbot. It is said to occasionally drive past and, more rarely, through the Stoke Abbot churchyard.

## CHAPTER XVI

HAUNTED CHURCHES IN THE SOUTH  
OF ENGLAND (*continued*)

THE Battle Abbey ghost crops up periodically. According to an article in *The Daily Herald*, it was seen and heard in the ruined crypt one night by Mr. Vane-Pennell and his sister.<sup>1</sup> The crypt is not an unlikely spot for a haunting because it was once a mortuary.

The Vane-Pennells held a nocturnal vigil there, hoping to experience some kind of a superphysical manifestation, and, seemingly, they were not disappointed.

Towards midnight Mr. Vane-Pennell saw on the floor of the crypt a shadow, so like a cowled monk, that he woke his sister, who had fallen asleep, to look at it. Afterwards they both heard in the room overhead shuffling footsteps and the creaking of boards, although the floor was no longer boarded but paved with asphalt. Also, it was stated, they heard in the room overhead a man's voice singing part of the "Gloria in excelsis," and were convinced that their experience was of a genuine ghostly nature.

A strange tale was told me some years ago by a Mr. Baker. He was very interested in architecture and was looking at a gargoyle in a Sussex church one day when its face slowly changed and became

that of one of his maiden aunts to whom he was greatly attached. Thinking it was just a trick of his sight he closed his eyes, but when he opened them again his aunt's face was still there.

Then very abruptly it changed back into that of the gargoyle. That evening he received a telegram saying his aunt was dead. She had died, quite suddenly, at the very time he had seen her face in the church.

When several days later he mentioned the incident to the then vicar of the church, the latter said : " You are not the first person who has had a strange experience with that particular gargoyle.

" Only last year, Mrs. Jones,<sup>1</sup> a member of my congregation, told me she was in the church one morning, arranging the floral decorations for the Harvest Thanksgiving, when she heard a chuckle, so wholly malevolent that she was very startled, and on glancing hastily round to see who it could be—she thought she was alone in the building—her attention was drawn, in some peculiar manner, to the gargoyle in question. As she looked at it, it suddenly disappeared and in its place was an urn draped in black. To make sure it was no hallucination Mrs. Jones tried the unfailing test of pressing one eye. " If you press one eye," the vicar explained, " so as to throw it out of the parallel focus with the other, one of two things will happen. Should the object be the result of an hallucination, it will remain the same ; should it be no hallucination but really just as you first visualised it, it will now appear double. In Mrs. Jones' case it appeared double, therefore she realised, with something approaching a thrill—she

<sup>1</sup> 14th July, 1932.

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<sup>1</sup> A fictitious name but real person.

was naturally a very calm, self-possessed woman—that what she was now regarding must be superphysical and was probably an omen of some kind. Even as this thought flashed through her mind the urn vanished, and in its place was the gargoyle. The following day she heard of the death of a very near and dear relative. Undoubtedly," the vicar concluded, "the gargoyle is at times haunted and I have in my church, if not a unique, a certainly very extraordinary and not a little alarming harbinger of death. I most devoutly hope it won't be up to any of its antics during a service. Imagine what a commotion that would make."

If Chichester cathedral cannot boast of a haunted gargoyle, it can claim a traditional haunted steeple. According to a belief that has prevailed throughout centuries the falling of the steeple will only occur when there is no king on the throne and it will ever be an ill omen to royalty.

The well-known prophecy runs thus :

If Chichester steeple fall  
In England there's no king at all.

Now this has been curiously fulfilled at least once within living memory, when the spire collapsed in 1861, before the death of the Prince Consort.

A lady, for convenience sake I will call her Mrs. Bright, wrote to me some time before the Great War about an experience she once had in a Bournemouth church. She did not tell me the name of the church because she had promised the vicar not to divulge it. Her experience was as follows : she was passing the church one day, when she saw a tall, rather stylishly dressed lady in grey, beckoning. As

she did not know the lady she did not at first suppose the lady was beckoning to her but to someone else, and she was walking on when the lady, still beckoning, addressed her by her name. Wondering how the lady knew who she was, for she had no recollection of ever seeing her before, she crossed the road to the church and asked the lady what she wanted.

"I wonder if you will be so kind as to do me a favour," the lady said. She spoke in cultured tones but with an accent that puzzled Mrs. Bright. It was not Scottish or Irish, nor did it seem exactly foreign. What it was Mrs. Bright did not know, she had heard nothing quite like it before. The lady would have been very good-looking but for her teeth, which projected too much, and for her eyes, which were set rather too close together. It was a strong, intelligent face but there was a jarring note in it, something that struck Mrs. Bright as not altogether pleasant.

"What is the favour?" she queried.

"Why this," the lady said. "Three years ago the vicar of this church lent me a book. It was a prize he had won, when a boy at a public school. A Mrs. King<sup>1</sup> saw it one day at my house and I lent it to her. I went abroad soon after. The vicar has written to me several times about it, as he values it greatly and wants it back, but I haven't been able to answer his letters. Will you be very kind and tell him that Mrs. King has it? It is put away, with a number of other books, in a kind of lumber-room."

"But why can't you tell him yourself?" Mrs. Bright demanded. "It is a very extraordinary request for you to make, seeing I am an utter stranger

<sup>1</sup> All the names in this incident are fictitious by request.

to you. By the way, how did you know my name?" The lady smiled. "We'll call it telepathy," she said. "Let that suffice. Reasons which I can't explain to you prevent me telling the vicar in person. Please do me this favour."

Mrs. Bright wanted to protest, for she thought it cool impudence on the part of a stranger, but found herself, instead, promising to execute the lady's wish. "What is your name?" she enquired. "Mrs. Gibbons," the lady said, "Dora Gibbons; and now I must hurry off, for I have a very long way to go, and time is pressing."

Thanking Mrs. Bright, she smiled, and without offering to shake hands, walked quickly away, disappearing from view down an adjacent turning.

True to her promise, she was not the kind ever to break her word, Mrs. Bright, that same evening, interviewed the vicar of the church and delivered Mrs. Gibbon's message. The vicar's naturally smiling and genial countenance became very grave and thoughtful while she was speaking. "Would you please describe the lady," he said, when Mrs. Bright had finished. Mrs. Bright did so. The vicar, even more grave and thoughtful, nodded. "Yes," he remarked slowly, "that was Mrs. Gibbons. She had that curious accent and those physiognomical peculiarities. The odd thing, the *very* odd thing, about it is that I know, for certain, Mrs. Gibbons died abroad, just about a year ago."

He asked Mrs. King about his book. She did not remember ever having had it but, on searching, to make sure, she found it, among a pile of other books, in a room she used for lumber.

Capt. H. Spicer relates a ghostly bell incident in a

village near Weymouth.<sup>1</sup> A young lady and her governess were standing one summer evening, prior to going to bed, at the open window of a manor house, admiring the still beauty of the night. Suddenly the passing bell of the adjacent church began to toll. They were greatly surprised at this, since, so far as they were aware, no one was ill in the village. Had there been, they were pretty sure to have heard of it.

Early next morning news arrived that the young lady's grandfather, who lived some distance away, had died at nine o'clock, the very time the passing bell had tolled.

The parents of the young lady enquired if anyone had died in the village, and they were informed that no one had died in the village and no one, no *living person*, had tolled the bell, the keys of the church never having been out of the possession of the parish clerk.

<sup>1</sup> See *Strange Things Among Us*.

## CHAPTER XVII

HAUNTED CHURCHES IN THE WEST  
OF ENGLAND

I HAVE heard of several ghostly happenings in connection with places of worship in and around Bristol. Some years ago, when I was staying in Clifton, a Bristol journalist, who interviewed me for a local paper, told me that one of his sisters had seen the phantom nun, said to haunt, periodically, St. George's chapel, Brandon Hill. She was in the chapel one morning, as she thought alone, when she suddenly saw someone in white standing in the chancel. At first she thought it was one of the clergy, but, when the person turned round, she saw it was a woman wearing a nun-like costume.

The woman did not appear to notice my informant's sister but seemed to be gazing intently at some far-away object in the nave of the building. She maintained this attitude for some seconds, and then walking towards the pulpit disappeared in such an abrupt and mysterious manner that my informant's sister was not a little startled and mystified. She learned afterwards, for the first time, that the chapel was reputed to be haunted by a nun, the origin of the haunting being unknown.

When I was last visiting Clifton a member of a well-known local family sent me an account of a ghostly experience she once had in a church not half a mile from Durdham Downs.

"One Sunday morning," she said, "I was standing in the north exit of the church, the special children's service was going on. Wondering how far it had proceeded, I looked through the curtain and was rather surprised to see that the priest, whom I took for the vicar, was standing facing the people. Then I saw most distinctly it was not the vicar, but a curate, who had died some months before. The vision passed away in a few seconds and I saw the celebrant, Mr. ——, was kneeling before the altar."

Rumours have occasionally been afloat concerning ghostly happenings in a building connected with Bristol Cathedral.

In the hope of experiencing some of the phenomena alleged to take place there, I obtained permission of its custodians to do an all-night vigil in the building. This was two years ago. Among those who accompanied me was Miss Jean Colin, one of the prettiest and most charming principal boys I have seen at the Prince's Theatre, Park Row, Bristol, and I have been to a good many pantomimes there.

The only incident of note that occurred, and which certainly did create a momentary thrill or two in the hearts of the more sensitive of the party, was a sudden thud, found to be due to a mishap to a little dog, the rather stout pet of one of the ladies. Whether through fright at seeing a ghost, most dogs are very susceptible to psychic influences, or through having eaten not wisely but too well, it lost its balance and tumbled downstairs, fortunately with no worse result than a jarring.

As regards Bristol Cathedral itself I have heard nothing of a ghostly nature, but I have heard of one

psychic happening in the church of St. Mary's, Redcliffe.

A friend of mine who had recently seen service with the C.I.V. in the South African War, being on a visit to Clifton, thought he would like to attend a Sunday evening service in St. Mary's, Redcliffe.

When living in Clifton he had frequently attended services there. Arriving early, he got a seat in the rear of the building, as he thought he might have to leave before the sermon. Soon afterwards, a very attractive little girl of about eleven years of age, wearing a dark blue coat and shirt, and felt hat with a school ribbon, stole noiselessly up the aisle to a seat a few rows in front of him. There seemed to be something familiar about her, and when she suddenly looked round and, smiling, pointed to the handsome gold watch on her wrist, he recognised her. She was his terribly spoilt god-child, Delphine Kent, daughter of an old schoolfellow of his, who lived somewhere between Bath and Bristol. And as he looked at her and nodded, he recalled an incident which had occurred just before he left England for South Africa. He had given her a gold wristlet watch, and had been very cross because, when romping with some other girls in the garden, she had lost it. She had been angry with him for scolding her, and, in accordance with her wilful nature, wouldn't kiss him when he left, saying she hoped she would never see him again.

All this came back to him as he saw her pretty little face smiling so affectionately at him. But why was she there, apparently alone? Where were her parents? In a short time the intervening seats filled, but he was still able to see her. The first

hymn was in progress when his eyes once again wandered to her seat. To his surprise she was no longer there, nor could he see her anywhere. Could she, he asked himself, have gone out without his noticing her? It seemed impossible, since he occupied a seat next to the aisle, and in order to leave the building she would have had to pass close by him.

Somehow he could not dismiss her from his mind. He was perturbed, why exactly he did not know, but he had a foreboding of ill, and finding himself quite unable to follow the service, he got up, while they were singing, and hurriedly left the church. The following morning he called on Delphine's parents, whom he had neither seen nor heard from for two years. He thought they both looked rather worn and dejected, and the house seemed unusually quiet.

"Where's Delphine?" he queried. "I saw her in church last night."

"You must have been mistaken," Mr. Kent said quietly. "Delphine's dead. She died six months ago. Pneumonia."

Having been very fond of Delphine my friend was greatly upset, and not a little astounded, for he had felt so sure at the time that he had seen her in St. Mary's, Redcliffe.

When he and Kent were alone in the room, Kent said: "What did you mean by saying you saw Delphine at church last night?"

My friend explained. "That's very strange," Kent commented. "How was she dressed?" My friend told him.

"Yes," Kent said. "That is what she wore.

It was the orthodox costume at her school. You remember the incident of the watch. Well, it was discovered, soon after you went, in the hollow of a tree, where, doubtless, she had placed it for safety. She wanted very badly to write and tell you but we didn't know your address. Delphine was devoted to you, Rex. Almost her last words were, 'Be sure to give him my love,' meaning you.

"I have no doubt whatever it was her spirit you saw in church, permitted to come back to tell you about the watch. She was so terribly upset at losing it."

In 1846 rumours of strange happenings in a vicarage and an adjoining church were current in Bristol.<sup>1</sup> The vicarage, up to the time of the dissolution of the Calendars, their residence, adjoined and almost formed a part of All Saints church, Bristol.

Living in the vicarage were the Rev. and Mrs. Jones, the sexton and sextoness of All Saints, one or two lodgers, and two servants, namely, a maid and cook.

The phenomena, which were both auditory and visual, did not, apparently, begin to occur till about the beginning of the aforesaid year. The occupants of the house, particularly Mr. and Mrs. Jones, were then aroused every night by heavy footsteps walking about the house. Sometimes the footsteps would enter their bedroom, and Mr. Jones declared he saw, on several occasions, a ghostly light flickering on the wall. But it was the maid who appears to have had the most harrowing experiences, for not only did she hear the footsteps creaking their way up the

<sup>1</sup> See *Bristol Times* for that year.

staircase and along the passage leading to her room, but she repeatedly heard a bolt, which was on the inside of the door, slyly slid back and someone enter the room. She could neither scream nor bury her head under the bedclothes, but was apparently constrained by an all-compelling power to look. What she saw was a figure resembling a man with whiskers, clad in a fashion "lang syne gane," that corresponded, in some measure, with the costume of the Calendars, the former ancient inhabitants of the building.

Sometimes the phantom would approach the bed and shake it, an act which, seemingly, broke the spell gripping the maid, for she was then always able to dive under the clothes and lie quaking there till the ghost had left the room. It was reported that certain of the phenomena, namely, the footsteps and ghostly light, had been experienced in the adjoining church as well, to the terror of the congregation.

Mrs. Crowe, on hearing of these constant strange happenings, was so interested that she wrote about them to the editor of *The Bristol Times*, who informed her "that the whole affair remained wrapped in the same mystery as when chronicled in the pages of his paper."

The haunting would seem to have continued nightly for some considerable time and then to have abruptly ceased.

I have before me a cutting, undated, from *The Daily Chronicle*, relating to the haunting of a house built on the supposed site of the old churchyard of St. Philip's, Bristol. The phenomena, which occurred nightly, were trampings up and down the staircases, along passages and across floors. There was no ap-

parent satisfactory explanation, on physical grounds, to account for them. On hearing about them, Press representatives interviewed a Mr. and Mrs. Sanders, who had lived in the house for many years. They both corroborated the rumours of the ghostly noises, stating that they had heard "the mysterious trampings" about half a dozen times in two years. They sounded like a man, with a very heavy tread, perambulating the house. On one occasion Mrs. Sanders heard them, when alone in the house, and was so scared that she ran, screaming for help, into the yard.

Mr. Sanders' parents had formerly occupied the house, and it was during their time an old gravestone, bearing the date 1734, had been found, amid a pile of rubbish, in the yard and utilised for the kitchen hearth.

People in the vicinity thought that, possibly, the removal and utilising, for practical purposes, of this stone may have had something to do with the disturbances.

Be this as it may the premises were undoubtedly haunted, and continued to be so till their demolition, some years ago, for widening purposes.

A strange story is told of St. Decuman's church, Watchet, Somerset.<sup>1</sup>

A schoolmaster, passing the church one night, met some robbers, who asked him where the rich lady who had recently died was buried. At first he refused to say, but when they threatened to kill him, he told them. Arriving at the crypt of the church, they took the iron bars out of the grating and

<sup>1</sup> See *Customs, Superstitions and Legends of the County of Somerset*, by C. H. Poole.

pushed him through the opening, bidding him go to the lady's coffin, take the lid off and bring them the seven rings from the corpse's fingers.

He had got six rings and was pulling the last one off, when the dead lady cried out: "Brothers and sisters arise quickly and help me. No rest had I during my life, and now they will let me have none, even immediately after death."

As the voice concluded, all the coffins in the vault burst open and the ghosts of the dead came out. The robbers, hearing the noise, decamped in a panic. The schoolmaster ran up a flight of stone steps into the church, hid in the choir and slammed the door to. The ghosts of the dead ran after him, and mounting on coffins, climbed into the choir. He got a pole and kept pushing them down till midnight, when they returned to the crypt. As soon as they had gone, the schoolmaster made a panicked exit to his home and was very ill.

Feeling he would not recover, he sent for the clergyman of the parish and told him what had happened. A few days later he was dead.

The Rev. Bourchier Wrey Savile narrates a ghostly happening in connection with the Pine-Coffins of Portledge, North Devon.<sup>1</sup> In the year 1868, when this house was let to Mr. and Lady Mary Crosse, the household of the latter were alarmed one night by hearing the church bell suddenly toll at midnight. In the morning they enquired the cause, and were informed by their neighbours that no earthly hands had touched the bell in the night but that it was always heard to toll before a death in the Pine-Coffin family.

<sup>1</sup> See *Apparitions*.

"This was confirmed by news being received from India of the death of Mrs. Kitson, wife of an officer in the East Devon militia and daughter of Mr. Pine-Coffin, who had died at the very time Mr. Crosse's household had heard the bell toll out so mournfully in the dead of night."

## CHAPTER XVIII

HAUNTED CHURCHES IN THE WEST  
OF ENGLAND (*continued*)

MRS. ROBERT HARRISON, a lady I met some years ago at a London club, told me of an experience she once had in a Weston-super-Mare church. She was living in Weston-super-Mare at the time and, according to her custom, went one Sunday to morning service at the church.

Just before the service began one of the vergers came up to her and, in an awe-struck whisper, informed her she was wanted home at once. Fearing something dreadful had happened, she immediately left the church and hurried as fast as she could to her house. Much to her relief she found nothing had happened to any member of the household, and she was greatly astonished to hear no message had been sent by anyone in the house to the church. What then did the verger mean by saying she was wanted at home? Who could have told him such a thing? If it was a hoax, it was in excessive bad taste and most unpardonable. Boiling over with indignation she was about to go back to the church to question the verger when a telegram came. It was from one of her sisters, asking her to come to Bath at once, as her mother had been taken suddenly ill. It was in pre-motor-car days and she had to go by train. She arrived just before her mother passed away. Had she stayed

for the service she would not have been in time to hear the few farewell words of the parent she loved so very dearly. On her return to Weston she asked the verger who had given him the message. "It was a gentleman," he said. "Quite a stranger to me. I was standing by the main entrance when he entered the church. He came straight to me and said: 'Will you kindly tell Mrs. Robert Harrison, you know who I mean, she is wanted at home at once. It is very urgent.'

"What is your name, sir?" I asked.

"Never mind my name," he said. "If she enquires, say 'Old Orchid,'" and with that he walked away, before I had time to utter another word."

"Will you describe him?" Mrs. Harrison said. The verger did so, with great attention to detail, and the description tallied exactly with that of Mrs. Harrison's grandfather, who had died in Bath two years previously and was nicknamed "Old Orchid," because he was very fond of orchids and always wore one, when he went out, in his button-hole.

A dream story was told me, not long ago, in connection with Exeter cathedral and a Truro church. My informant was an engineer. For convenience sake I will call him Martin. At the time of the occurrence he was a mining student in Cornwall. He had been to London for a holiday, and, on his way back to Cornwall, he got out at Exeter, thinking he would like to take a look at the town. It was a piping hot day in July and at last, weary with tramping about, he turned into the cathedral and sat down in the nave. The heat made him sleepy and after a while he dozed off.

He had a strange dream. He fancied he was

witnessing a wedding. It did not seem to be taking place in the cathedral but in a much smaller building. He noticed one window in particular. It was of stained glass, not very old he fancied, but the figures depicted in it had a peculiar fascination for him; so strong a fascination, indeed, that it was with difficulty he tore his eyes away from them and looked at the ceremony that was taking place.

The bridal pair were standing in front of the clergyman. He did not see their faces till the Wedding March was played and they came down the centre aisle. The bridegroom was young and tall, with regular features and dark hair and eyes. The bride was a pretty blonde, with natural golden hair and deep blue eyes. She appeared to be very happy and smiled at some of the people as she passed by them. She was about half way down the church when her expression of happiness gave way to one of the utmost horror.

Glancing at her husband Martin froze. A frightful change had taken place in the young man. His hitherto attractive features were now terribly contorted, and there was a wild, evil look in his dark, glittering eyes as he rolled them at his horrified, shrinking wife.

The man was undoubtedly mad, a raving, homicidal lunatic. Putting his hand in one of his pockets he drew out a white horn-handled razor. Sick with apprehension, but unable to stir or make a sound, Martin feared the madman was about to murder the bride, but, instead of attacking her, chuckling horribly, he drew the keen edge of the razor across his own throat. And, with the frantic screams of the agonised wife ringing in his ears,

Martin woke. The dream made such an impression on him, it was so very vivid and realistic, that he was glad to get out of the gloomy precincts of the cathedral into the bright and sunny street.

The following year he was strolling about Truro one morning when he noticed a small crowd of people gathered round the entrance to a church. On inquiring what was going on, he was told it was a wedding. Now he was not, as a rule, in the slightest degree interested in weddings, but somehow he felt compelled to go to this one, though he had no idea of the identity of the happy pair.

The church was very full, but he managed to secure a seat about the middle of the building. There was something strangely familiar about it, and when his eyes alighted on one of the windows he recognised it in an instant, it was the window he had seen in his dream, the painted window with the figures that had so fascinated him.

Not knowing what to make of it all, it seemed so strange and mysterious, he sat watching the ceremony till it was over, and everything was just as it had been in his dream. The same parson, the same congregation, and, when he saw their faces as they came down the centre aisle, the same young bride and bridegroom. In fearful anticipation he watched them draw nearer and nearer to him, expecting every moment to see their faces change and assume the respective expressions he had seen in his dream, but nothing of the sort happened. Still smiling and nodding to their friends, they passed out of the church into the carriage that was waiting for them and drove away amid shouts and laughter, and showers of confetti. What subsequently became of

them he never heard, but he has often wondered why he had that dream and if the Powers that sent it him intended it as a warning for the bride. But if so, what could he have done? What should he have done?

Though traditions and legends of the Satanic Majesty, the Devil, are associated with many old Cornish churches, I have not been able to discover more than a very few cases of what might be termed genuine hauntings, and they mostly refer to the past.

Here is one, rather typical. In one of the wildest and most beautiful spots in Cornwall, namely, the deep and rocky vale of Trevillet, in the parish of Tintagel, stands the chapel of St. Nectan. Few kings have been saints, many of them would seem to have been rather the opposite, but Nectan, apparently, was somewhat of an exception, for, according to the historian Wilson,<sup>1</sup> he was both a king and a saint. He is credited with having built many churches and done many worthy and kindly deeds. Among the churches he erected was the one named after him at Trevillet. This appears to have been his favourite, at any rate it was here he spent the latter part of his life, and here he had his silver bell, the notes of which could be heard by fishermen and mariners far out on the blue waters of the Bristol Channel.

During his declining years a strife was going on in the land between churchmen, and St. Nectan vowed his bell should never ring for others than those who followed the true doctrine.

When he was on his death-bed he bade his attendants carry him to the bank overhanging the

<sup>1</sup> See *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*.

Kieve, a deep rock basin full of pure water from the stream that, leaping down the rocks into the valley, runs bubbling merrily into the distant sea.

Arriving at the Kieve, St. Nectan grasped the ver bell, rang it sharply three times, and then dropped it into the water. This done, he lay back and passed peacefully away.

After his death two foreign ladies, said to be sisters, came to the valley and took possession of all St. Nectan's goods. The sacramental plate and other sacred treasures, together with everything he had of value, they put in a chest and buried in a hole in the stream, a little distance from the Kieve and below it. The two strange women created great curiosity in the village by their mode of living. They calmly took up their abode in the church, closing its doors to the villagers, who were too afraid of them to attempt to evict them.

There they lived alone, keeping no servant, seeing and talking to no one in the neighbourhood, and existing on no ordinary food. The villagers declared common garden snails, which they were seen gathering from walls, formed their chief diet. In course of time they died, one soon after the other, and were buried in unconsecrated ground with nothing to mark their graves. After their deaths services were resumed in the chapel, but it was not long before rumours of ghostly happenings in and around it got mooted abroad. People passing the chapel at night spoke of seeing the windows illuminated with a ghostly leadenish blue glow and of seeing, also, two shrouded female forms pass into or emerge from the building, through *closed* doors. On one occasion an old man was followed by the figures

till he came to the place where the sisters had been buried, when they left him, almost insane with terror. On another occasion a woman and child, passing through the valley one evening on their way home, heard unearthly screams coming from the church. As they halted, petrified with fright, the main door of the church opened and a black, monstrous shape, like nothing human nor any animal they knew, appeared on the threshold. Sick with terror they watched it emerge and move along the valley, in the direction of the mysterious women's graves.

They waited till the gloom and shadows of the night hid it from view and then ran home, as fast as their legs would carry them.

Many efforts have been made to locate the silver bell and treasure chest, but, so far, without success.

On one occasion, when some miners were blasting the Kieve, they suddenly heard the ringing of a bell and a voice, proceeding from the stream feeding the Kieve, say, in hollow, unearthly, but very distinct tones : "The child is not yet born who shall recover the bell or chest."

They were so appalled that they ceased work at once and restored the stream to its old channel.<sup>1</sup>

To this day the tower of Forrabury church remains without bells. No marriage chime or funeral knell is ever heard proceeding from the building and this is why.<sup>2</sup> Centuries ago the inhabitants of Forrabury desired their church to have bells, which, for sweetness and power, would rival the

<sup>1</sup> See *A Londoner's Walk to the Land's End*, by Walter White, and *Rambles beyond Railways*, by Wilkie Collins.

<sup>2</sup> See *Popular Romances of the West of England*, by Robert Hunt, F.R.S.

bells of the neighbouring church of Tintagel. The bells were cast, and blessed, and put on board a ship for Forrabury.

In spite of rough seas and adverse winds the ship made remarkable progress and was nearing its destination, the harbour of Bottreaux, whence the bells would be borne to the church, when the pilot happened to remark that they ought to thank God for their speedy voyage. At this the captain laughed and, using profane words, said it was not God but themselves they had to thank. Hardly had he given utterance to his speech before the ship was struck by a huge wave and sunk. To this day those passing over the spot where the bells lie submerged can, always prior to a very disastrous storm, hear sweet, unearthly chiming.

A strange story is told of the church of Perranzabuloe.<sup>1</sup> An old lady poking about one day in the churchyard of Perranzabuloe found some good teeth, presumably false.

Pocketing them she took them home and, on retiring to rest, put them on her dressing-table.

She speedily went to sleep, but was awakened abruptly by sounds under the window. Sitting up she listened, and presently a voice called out : " Give me my teeth, give me my teeth."

At first she took no notice of this, but the cries were so continual and there was something so wholly unearthly about them that, at last, badly scared, she leaped out of bed and picking up the teeth threw them on to the road.

Directly she did this, she heard queer footsteps patter away in the direction of the church, and when

<sup>1</sup> See *Popular Romances of the West of England*.

she got up very early and searched the road outside the house, there was no sign of any teeth. She never heard the voice or footsteps again.

St. Levan is credited with uttering a prophecy concerning the church which bears his name.

On the south side of the church there is a rock with a fissure right across it. In this fissure are ferns and wild flowers.

Tradition asserts that before the rock showed any crack St. Levan used to sit on it. One day, inspired by the desire to leave some enduring mark of himself in connection with his dearly beloved church, he smote the rock so hard that it cracked. He then blessed the fissure and said : <sup>1</sup>

When, with panniers astride,  
A pack-horse can ride  
Through St. Levan's stone  
The World will be done.

According to Mr. Hunt, who often visited the church, the fissure expands so slowly, if it expands at all, that it will be thousands of years before it is wide enough to admit a pack-horse and panniers. Hence, one need have no apprehension regarding the end of the world ; it will certainly not come in the days of this generation.

<sup>1</sup> *Popular Romances of the West of England*.

## CHAPTER XIX

## WELSH CHURCH GHOSTS

WELSH churches, more particularly churchyards, would seem to have a peculiar attraction for the superphysical, for not a few of them are reputed to have been, or still to be, haunted, not infrequently by the Devil, or by one of his satellites. A tradition of haunting by the Devil is associated with the churchyard of Llanarth, near Aberaeron. One night, many centuries ago, when the rain was descending in cataracts and the wind blowing furiously, someone, battling their way past the church, noticed a dull, glimmering light in what appeared to be the belfry.

Wondering what it could be, he halted under a big tree and watched it.

Suddenly, instead of the mere glimmer, there was a flash, followed by a succession of flashes of startling magnitude, which illuminated the church and the surrounding objects with a lurid, ghostly light of leadenish blue. In between the flashes the objects seemed to recede into a darkness and gloom that was hellish in its intensity.

The loneliness and silence of the place added to the terror of the spectator, who wanted to run away but found himself utterly unable to move. Compelled to remain where he was, he presently heard the most unearthly cries and groans coming from the churchyard. They did not cease till the dawn broke and

the cocks in the vicinity began to crow. It was then, and not till then, that the villager, who was nearly dead with fright and chilled to the bone, recovered the use of his limbs and was able to make for his home. He related what had happened to his friends, they told others, and in a very short time the whole village was discussing the dreadful nocturnal goings-on up at the parish church. That night, though the weather was again wild, a crowd, large for the size of the village, assembled outside the church, in expectation of seeing the lights and hearing the ghostly sounds. Nor were they disappointed, for, about midnight, lurid flashes again came from the belfry, to be followed by blood-curdling, unearthly noises. Some of the villagers were so frightened they took to their heels, others would have liked to have followed their example but found themselves glued to the spot. One went to the vicarage and begged the parson to come at once to the church. Grumbling very much at being disturbed the parson got into his clothes and, armed with bell, book and candle, the usual implements for laying ghosts, shuffled along to the church.

To give him due credit, all his apathy vanished directly he arrived there and saw and heard the phenomena. Screwing up his courage, and uttering prayer after prayer, he entered the church and, lighted candle in hand, ascended the spiral staircase leading to the belfry.

Some say it was the Devil himself that confronted him, others declare it was one of the Devil's demons, but whichever or whatever it was, it presented such a frightful appearance that it took all the parson's will-power to stand his ground.

He did, however, face the horrible thing, and directly he began to repeat the Lord's Prayer it turned and climbing on to the roof of the tower, jumped down into the churchyard and vanished.

Examining the ground under the belfry the following day the vicar found a stone with four circular, newly-made holes in it. It was just where the evil spirit had alighted, therefore, the vicar argued, the holes could only have been made by its hellish hoofs. All who saw the stone and knew about the strange happenings at the church agreed with him, and the stone subsequently became known as "the stone with the Devil's hoof marks."

It is said to be still in the churchyard, but the inscription explaining the origin of the holes is nearby effaced, worn away by the hand of Time.

Up to the time of the ghostly disturbances Llanarth church is rumoured to have had four bells, but after the disturbances one is said to have disappeared very mysteriously, and it was believed that it had been carried off by the Devil to the then cathedral of Llanbadarn Fawr, which suddenly became the possessor of three bells, whereas previously it had only had two. On his way to Llanbadarn Fawr with the purloined bell the Devil is supposed to have rested for a while in a hollow called Rhiw Cyrff, which henceforth was so cursed that no one visiting it could ever hear the bells of Llanarth, although Llanarth church is only a short distance away.

The Devil is said to have been seen, during the last century, hovering around the churchyards of Rhosygarth, Llanilar and Lledrod, sometimes in the form of a tall man in black with a white, evil face,

and sometimes in the guise of a figure with the trunk and limbs of a man and the head of a wolf, or dog. Very possibly it was not the Devil but what, for want of a more accurate name, modern writers of works about the superphysical term an Elemental.

Be that as it may, it must have been very startling, for some of those reported to have seen it were ill for a considerable time afterwards, one or two never recovering.

A story is told of Llangadock, similar to the stories told about Semerwater, Gormire and other places I have mentioned. An ancient town or village is said to have once occupied a site near it, and to have been swallowed up in some convulsion of Nature. Even to this day, people gifted with the faculty of clairaudience can, on certain nights in the year, if they stand anywhere very near where it is rumoured to lie, hear the melancholy chiming of its ghost-rung ancient bells.

In 1877 a great scare was caused in and around Ebbw Vale by two ghosts, those of a woman and infant. The woman phantom, clad in white and carrying a baby in her arms, was seen perambulating streets and lonely country roads, more particularly in the immediate vicinity of a certain mill stream and village churchyard.

The following is one account of the appearances : a father and son were returning to their home, some miles to the west of Ebbw Vale, between two and three o'clock one morning, after a long day on business in Ebbw Vale. It was barely daylight when they set out ; but after they had walked two or three miles the landscape began to be visible in the grey light of morning. The weather was warm,

what might be described as muggy, with a slight drizzle and thin mist. Griffith, the son, being rather footsore, was following his father a short distance in the rear. They had passed a disused quarry, and Griffith was looking at the south side of the highway, when he saw the misty figure of a woman, walking lightly along the bank of a mill stream that was about twenty yards from the road. She was dressed in white, but, whether due to the dimness of the light or to soil, her clothes looked anything but clean. She appeared to be carrying what at first sight looked like a bundle in her arms but which Griffith perceived, later on, was a little child, also swathed in dirty white. She was going in the same direction as Griffith and walking parallel with him. Although her form loomed somewhat ghostly through the mist and by the grey of dawn, yet Griffith felt no fear ; for he thought she was some poor waif, with no better home than the cold, inhospitable earth. Inspired by curiosity, he left off picking up stones and hurling them at trees and other wayside objects, as is the habit of boys, to watch the woman, and felt in his pockets for a penny to give her. Though he could not discern her features very clearly, yet he could see she was young and might have been pretty, had her circumstances been better. As it was, she looked wan and pinched. She did not glance in his direction but kept her eyes fixed on a point before her, and trudged steadily on, as if desirous of proceeding to her journey's end. The stream flowed on for some hundred yards farther, parallel with the road, and then, making an abrupt bend, spanned a bridge. The woman kept on a level with Griffith, whose gaze never left her, she had a curious fascination for him,

till she came along the bank by the curve of the stream, when she suddenly disappeared. Thinking she had fallen into the water, Griffith immediately ran to the spot, at the same time shouting to his father that the poor woman had slipped into the stream.

He could not have been more than a few seconds getting to the stream, yet he could see no sign of the woman, or any disturbance of the water such as would have been caused by the falling of any heavy body. He was still searching about for the woman when she suddenly reappeared on the far side of the stream, trudging along, as before, with the child in her arms.

Griffith's father now came running up and asked Griffith what was the matter and why he had shouted. Griffith, pointing at the woman, explained, but to his astonishment his father declared he must be dreaming, there was no woman. He argued that if there had been a woman on the other bank of the stream, which was not more than a few yards away, she could not possibly have escaped his observation, the thin mist and drizzle not being sufficient to obscure objects at that distance. He was beginning to laugh and tease Griffith for his imaginings when he abruptly paused and bade him come quickly from the stream and continue on his way. They walked on, leaving the stream, winding in and out the somewhat bare and rugged landscape, in their rear, and Griffith still saw the mysterious woman with the child, keeping pace with them. She continued to do this till they came to a churchyard on the outskirts of a village. Griffiths then saw her pass through the shut gate of the churchyard, walk a little

distance up the path leading to the church, and suddenly, inexplicably disappear. Soon after this happened, and while they were yet walking through the village, which was only a mile or two from their home, Griffith's father said, "Did you ever hear of the Ebbw Vale woman in white?"

"No, father," Griffith replied. "Never. Who is she?"

His father then told him one version in explanation of the haunting that was scaring the neighbourhood of Ebbw Vale. It was this: A pretty young Welsh country girl had the misfortune to attract the attention of the son of a well-to-do local farmer. The young man was at first quite sincere in his love-making and really wanted to marry her.

His father, however, strongly objected to such a match, considering the girl to be in far too inferior a position. For some time his son stubbornly resisted his endeavours to make him throw the girl over, but in the end gave in, and decided to seduce the girl and then abandon her. The girl being too virtuous for him to obtain his ends except by marriage, he deceived her by a false ceremony, and persuaded her to keep their union a secret until such a time as he could safely disclose it to his very arbitrary father. To this the girl agreed, and although the young man's repeated visits to her father's house, where she continued to live, roused suspicion and brought her many scoldings and reproaches, she bore them all patiently, under the belief that she was a lawfully wedded wife, and before long would be able to clear her reputation and live comfortably with her husband.

After some months the young man slackened in

his visits, and was for ever making excuses why he could not come to see her.

And as his visits became still rarer, his manner towards her became proportionately rougher and less affectionate. Some weeks had gone by without her seeing him, and he had taken no notice of her repeated pleadings to make their marriage known, when her great trouble fell upon her, and her child was born. Her father, a typical bigot of the old, very strict keep-the-Sabbath, psalm-singing order, was stern and unbending. He vowed to turn "the wicked brat" that had brought such disgrace on him out of the house, as soon as she was able to walk again. In her grief and desperation she told him of her secret marriage. He at once went to the farmer and told him his son was married to his daughter. The farmer was furious, for his son just then was courting the daughter of a retired and fairly prosperous sea-captain. He told the old man he was a liar, that his son was not married to the girl, and that if he did not leave the house immediately he would have him arrested for attempting to extort money.

It was in vain he raved and stormed, the father of the poor girl held his own and would not be put off till he had seen the son.

The son made every excuse to avoid meeting him, but in the end he was obliged to do so. When the girl's father learned the young man had not properly married his daughter he struck and cursed him, saying: "If you marry anyone but my daughter, may you never enjoy happiness, may no child be born to your wife, and may you ever be haunted by the girl you have so basely deceived."

He then went back to his home and did all he could to comfort his wretched daughter. Early on the day of the farmer's son's marriage with the daughter of the sea-captain, the deserted girl had an interview with her foul seducer. What transpired at it was never known. That night she did not return to her father's cottage, and when he and some of his neighbours searched for her the following day, they found the bodies of her and her child in the mill stream near her home. As there were no marks of violence on her, and nothing to show how she had fallen in the water, the coroner's jury returned a verdict of Found Drowned. While some thought it was a case of suicide, that heart-broken at the way she had been treated, she had gone straight from her base lover's home and thrown herself in the stream ; others, and they were in the majority, believed she and her child had been murdered. Be that as it may, no action of any kind was taken and the affair passed into the ever-swelling category of unsolved mysteries. After his marriage the farmer's son went to live in Ebbw Vale, but not to enjoy happiness, for there was constant wrangling between him and his wife, chiefly over money. No child was born to them, and in the end he drank himself to death. He always complained to his friends that he was tormented by the apparition of the girl he had wronged. It gave him no peace, continually entering his room at night and tugging the clothes off his bed.

"Odd to relate," Griffith's father concluded, "though many years have elapsed since the bad man died, a ghost believed to be that of the girl he deceived still not only periodically haunts the street in Ebbw Vale where he lived, but certain lonely

country roads and lanes, more particularly the banks of the mill stream we passed and the church-yard where the woman in white you saw so mysteriously vanished. Boy, that was her ghost. I saw it too."

## CHAPTER XX

THE CHURCHYARD WHERE THE GRASS  
WOULD NOT GROW

**I**N the year 1818 "Oakfield," a picturesque, ivy-clad house in the village of Chirbury, near Montgomery, was inhabited by a widow, a Mrs. Harris, and her daughter Jane. "Oakfield" had undergone many vicissitudes. It had originally, and for many generations, been in the possession of a family named Pearse,<sup>1</sup> but, owing to the reckless extravagance and consequent pecuniary embarrassment of one of them, the last to inherit it, the place had eventually been sold to a stranger. It was then converted from a manor house into a farm, which, after passing, in a more or less decadent condition, through several hands, was at last bought by a Mr. James Morris. Mr. Morris, however, being lazy, easy-going, and very careless with regard to money, proved less successful even than any of his predecessors, and on his death it was generally thought that the place would be taken over by Thomas Pearce, a descendant of the original owners, since he had given out that Mr. Morris wished to let it and had promised to accept him as a tenant.

To Pearce's bitter disappointment, however, for he was naturally very keen on living in the house that had once been inhabited by his ancestors, and

<sup>1</sup> Spelt Pearce in *Haunted Homes and Family Legends of Great Britain*, by J. H. Ingram, p. 520.

to everyone's surprise, the widow Morris announced her intention of remaining on at "Oakfield," to see if she and her daughter Jane could possibly make the farm pay. For a time she succeeded; then, suddenly, her luck changed, everything seemed to go wrong with her, and Pearce, who rejoiced thereat, was daily expecting to hear that she had decided to give the place up, when the unexpected happened. Mrs. Morris's brother arrived one day at "Oakfield" with a young man, and introducing him to his sister as John Newton,<sup>1</sup> a very clever and capable person, he persuaded her to engage him as farm bailiff, which she did, after asking only a few questions.

From the time Newton began to look after things, Mrs. Morris's luck changed again, and, thanks to his skill and perseverance, the farm prospered to such an extent that she speedily abandoned all idea of giving it up to Thomas Pearce.

The bailiff himself was very much a mystery. He showed no interest in the neighbourhood, to which he had come as an utter stranger, and no inclination to make any friends outside the farm, politely declining the proffers of hospitality he received from various of the local residents, and obstinately refusing to be drawn out by the most persistent and inveterate of the village gossips. On Sundays he was a constant attendant at Chirbury church, seldom missing a service, and his pale face, full of a wistful earnestness, while attracting much attention, created at the same time considerable curiosity. It was generally thought he was a man with a past, and much speculation arose as to what that past could have been.

<sup>1</sup> His real name was John Davies. (Vide *Haunted Homes and Family Legends*, p. 520.)

In his home life at the farm he threw off his reserve, to some extent. Though quiet and deferential, he talked often and well, having evidently travelled and seen much of the world, and, occasionally, after his daily work was done, he would entertain Mrs. Morris and her daughter by reading to them one of the novels or other books he had brought with him. He studiously avoided, however, referring either to his home or his family, or to anything of a personal nature connected with his former life, although it soon became apparent that he was more than merely partial to Jane ; for, when in her presence, his eyes seldom left her face, whilst his walks and talks with her became daily of more and more frequent occurrence.

With a fond mother's instinct, Mrs. Morris guessed that Newton was in love with Jane, but her belief in his integrity was such—since he had worked so assiduously and unceasingly on her behalf, and with such continued success—that she did not interfere ; and although she said nothing, at least nothing in any way committal, it was generally believed in the village that she was by no means averse to the prospect of a match between her daughter and the mysterious stranger, and there is little doubt that the love that had grown up so naturally between these two young people would have resulted in marriage, had not a sinister fate abruptly interfered.

Newton's skilful management of "Oakfield," and the fact that he was on excellent terms with Mrs. and Miss Morris, had awakened resentment and jealousy, respectively, in the minds of two persons. The one, Thomas Pearce, who felt a certain bitterness towards the young bailiff for the simple reason that,

had it not been for his, Newton's, advent to "Oakfield," he, Thomas Pearce, would almost certainly have succeeded in renting the farm ; and the other, Robert Parker, a local farmer and friend of Pearce, who hated Newton because the latter had obviously won the affections of Jane Morris, the girl whom he had himself fondly hoped to marry, although he could not deny that she had never given him the least encouragement.

In appearance and character there seems to have been a great difference between these two men. Pearce had been described as "stout and ruddy," with a "broad, good-humoured" face, and it seems certain that up to the time I am now writing about, he had shown himself to be a plain-living, honest, hard-working man ; so that, had it not been for Parker, whose stronger nature unquestionably influenced him, there is every reason to suppose that he would have eventually become reconciled to Newton's residing at "Oakfield" and perhaps even have become more or less friendly towards him. Parker, however, who has been portrayed as a "younger, slighter" man, with sharp, hawk-like features and a complexion almost foreign in its swarthiness, gave him no peace. He was continually with him, poisoning his mind more and more against Newton, until at last he succeeded in rousing his resentment against the bailiff to such a pitch that he agreed to take part in a scheme for effectually getting rid of him.

Newton was in the habit of attending local fairs, and the two conspirators, ascertaining that he was going, on a certain date in November 1821, on foot to Welshpool to attend the fair in the market-place of

that old town, decided to make that day the occasion for carrying out their nefarious plot. Consequently, the day arriving, they never ceased watching their unsuspecting victim's movements, shadowing him persistently wherever he went.

His business detaining him rather longer than he had expected, he did not leave Welshpool on his return journey till six o'clock, and he was then far too engrossed in his thoughts, which were probably of Jane, as he left the town, to think of glancing round to take a final look at it ; had he done so, he might have seen the plotters stealing stealthily after him, and perhaps have realised that they were up to no good.

On and on he trudged, his face set resolutely towards Chirbury, till he came to a particularly lonely lane. Here he was forced to slacken his pace a little, for the darkness of the night, now intensified by the rows of tall trees on either side of the lane, made it extremely difficult to see sufficiently to avoid any obstacle that might be in his path. Consequently, he was straining his eyes in his endeavours to pierce the intense gloom ahead of him, when a night bird croaked ominously and immediately afterwards someone approaching him noiselessly from his rear stumbled up against him.

He was about to speak when a voice, which he recognised as that of Robert Parker, electrified him by shouting out "Help, help, I'm being robbed !" Then, before he had time to realise what was happening, someone else came running up, and to his great astonishment he was rudely taken hold of by Thomas Pearce. Thinking it was a boorish joke, merely done to annoy him, for he knew neither of

the men liked him, he expostulated, bidding them release him, in the quietest and most dignified tones he could assume. To his utter dismay, however, they refused, and telling him that it was no joke on their part, and that, on the contrary, they were never more serious in their lives, they proceeded to drag him back with them to Welshpool. On arriving there they forced him to go with them to the local police, in whose presence they charged him with "highway robbery with violence," a crime then punishable with death. He protested, but it was of no avail. His accusers were men of sound standing and known respectability ; whereas he was a stranger, a mere nobody. The statement of his enemies was entered on the charge-sheet and he was at once taken into custody. His appearance before the local magistrate was just as farcical. Every word his accusers said was credited, while his protest of innocence was denounced as a barefaced lie. The result was just as the conspirators had wished and anticipated. No plot could possibly have met with greater success ; John Newton was committed, and in due course brought to trial at the forthcoming assizes. His behaviour there was somewhat extraordinary. In the presence of judge and jury he showed the same reticence that he had always shown towards everyone outside the family at "Oakfield." He asked no questions and employed no counsel, but merely protested, as he had protested all along, his entire innocence. It was only when he had been found "guilty," and the judge asked him if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him, that he at length gave utterance to something in the nature of a speech.

" My Lord," he began, " it is evident all I could say in opposition to such testimony would be vain and hopeless. The witnesses are men of respectability, and their evidence has appeared plain and conclusive, and my most solemn protestations could avail me nothing. I have called no witnesses to character, and upon such evidence the jury could pronounce no other verdict. I blame them not. From my soul, too, I forgive these men upon whose false testimony I have been convicted. But, my Lord, I protest most solemnly before this Court, before your Lordship, and above all, before that God in whose presence I must shortly appear, I am entirely guiltless of the crime for which I am about to suffer. I have produced no one to speak on my behalf. Two years have scarcely passed since I came into this country an utter stranger. I have made no acquaintance here beyond the household where I have been employed, and where I have endeavoured to discharge my duties faithfully, honestly and well. I could adduce testimony to this by bringing forward the mistress I have served and my fellow-labourers, but I have not imposed on them the painful task. I have called no one from my former neighbourhood. I would not have done so could it have saved my life. In truth, I wish not to live, and I am resigned even to the awful death which awaits me. I do not say, my Lord, that I am an innocent man. I have committed a crime, a grievous crime ; but it is only known to my Creator and myself. I have endeavoured to atone for it by all the means in my power, and to blot out its record from the Archangel's book by contrition and remorse. Since that fatal moment I have applied myself with all my

energies to the performance of my duties to my fellow-creatures ; and I humbly believe I have been forgiven.

" And now, my Lord, I protest once more I am entirely innocent of this charge. And, although I dare not hope, and do not wish, that my life should be spared, yet it is my devout and earnest desire that the stain of this crime may not rest upon my name. I devoutly hope that my good mistress and her kind and excellent daughter (here for the first time he showed signs of deep emotion) may yet be convinced that they have not cherished and befriended a highway robber.

" I have therefore, in humble devotion, offered a prayer to heaven, and believe it has been heard and accepted, and in meek dependence on a merciful God whom I have offended, but who, through the atonement of his blessed Son, has, I trust, pardoned my offences, I venture to assert that, if I am innocent of the crime for which I suffer, THE GRASS, FOR ONE GENERATION AT LEAST, WILL NOT COVER MY GRAVE."<sup>1</sup>

Having said these words, Newton folded his arms and stood in solemn silence, while the Judge pronounced the death sentence. At the execution a strange phenomenon took place. The day dawned wonderfully fine for the time of year, and there was a peculiar brightness and clarity in the atmosphere, which many agreed they had never experienced before. This condition of the weather continued right on until the prison bell began to toll for Newton's execution, when the sky suddenly became overcast. Then as the condemned man placed his foot on the scaffold, " a fearful darkness spread round ; and the

<sup>1</sup> See *The Robber's Grave*, by the Rev. R. Mostyn Pryce, published 1852.

moment the fatal bolt was withdrawn, the thunders rolled in awful majesty, until the tower hill seemed shaken to its base ; the rain poured down in torrents ; the multitude dispersed, horror-stricken and appalled, some crying out ‘the end of all things is come.’”

How exactly the truth concerning the conspiracy leaked out does not appear to be known for certain, but it is very possible that Pearce eventually confessed. It was noticed that, soon after the execution, he became very low-spirited and depressed, and it was not long before he fell a victim to a wasting disease, which many thought was due to something preying on his mind. Indeed, he was often heard to say, as if talking to himself, “ If I had known John Newton was in danger of being hanged I would never have appeared against him ” ; so that what is more likely than that, just before he passed away, he made a full admission of the part he had played in the plot to encompass Newton’s ruin ? Retribution also overtook Parker ; for, directly after Newton’s death, he took to drinking heavily and was killed at the blasting of some rocks at the lime works at Llanymynech.

Mrs. Morris and Jane lingered for a short time at “ Oakfields,” and although they were never seen to visit the churchyard in Montgomery where John Newton was buried, wild flowers were from time to time found strewn on his grave ; and that Jane put them there seems probable, since no more were ever seen there after she and her mother left Chirbury.

The grave, which is still in existence, lies in the corner of the churchyard at Montgomery. It is not

elevated, but is slightly below the level of the adjacent ground, which is particularly fertile, the grass on it being very thick and luxuriant.

With regard to the actual assertion of Newton that, if he were innocent of the crime for which he was about to suffer, the grass, for one generation at least, would not grow on his grave, Mr. Pryce, in 1852, wrote :

“ Thirty years have passed away and the grass has not covered his grave. . . . Numerous attempts have, from time to time, been made by some who are still alive, and others who have passed away, to bring grass upon that bare spot. Fresh soil has been frequently spread upon it and seeds of various kinds have been sown, but not a blade has ever been known to spring from them, and the soil has soon become a smooth and cold and stubborn clay.”

A corroboration in writing of the above<sup>1</sup> was made, some years later, by Mr. William Weeks, who dug Newton’s grave and was, either at that time or subsequently, parish clerk.

The latest information I have to hand is that the grass from around the grave has recently somewhat encroached upon it, though a bare spot, showing the shape of a cross, still remains visible.

There is no doubt, however, that for at least a generation no grass of any kind would grow there, and this phenomenon—for, in view of the fact that no satisfactory explanation of it on the basis of natural causes has ever been furnished, phenomenon assuredly it was—proves that the powers behind the scenes were not deaf to Newton’s petition, but actually did intervene in the manner he requested, to assert his innocence.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Haunted Homes and Family Traditions*, by J. Ingram, p. 525.

## CHAPTER XXI

## HAUNTED CHURCHES IN SCOTLAND

**S**COTLAND abounds in haunted castles, houses and outdoor places, but my quest for actual haunted church buildings has not been very fruitful. Haunted churchyards, yes, quite a number, but actual haunted churches very few.

Mr. Hugh Miller tells of a ghostly incident in connection with the churchyard at Fearn.<sup>1</sup>

A farmer of the parish, the evening of the day on which his wife was buried, proved how little affection he had had for her by going to the cottage of a young woman living close to the churchyard, and asking her to marry him. She accepted him, and, shortly before nightfall, she was sitting on his knee by the window, which opened on to the churchyard, laughing and joking with him. The girl's mother, happening to enter the room, was greatly shocked at their levity, and reminded the farmer that the woman who had been a good and faithful wife to him was lying "in all the entireness and almost all the warmth of life" not forty yards from where they were sitting and making such disgraceful love to one another. "No, no, Mother," the farmer laughed, "entire she may be but she was cold enough in all conscience before we laid her there." Hardly had he uttered these words when his expression changed from one of levity to one of the utmost terror, for

standing in the churchyard, peering through the window at him, was the shrouded figure of a woman. It was his dead wife. He fled to his home, took to his bed at once, and died of brain fever a fortnight later.

A weird happening in St. Giles, the oldest parish church in Edinburgh, and now usually called the Cathedral, was related to me by a Mrs. Porter, who for some time resided near the Meadows. She was in the transept of St. Giles one morning, when she felt a sharp blow on her back. She turned round but, to her astonishment, could see no one. She walked on, and had barely gone a yard before she received a second blow. As before, she could see no one when she swung quickly round.

Mystified, and not a little frightened, she had proceeded about another yard when she was struck in the same place a third time, and still perceived nothing to account for it.

Seeing an official of the church at the far side of the building she mentioned to him what had happened, whereupon he looked very grave and said: "You are not the only one who has had that experience, Madam. I don't want to alarm you but I fear very much you will be the recipient of bad news very shortly." His prophecy was speedily fulfilled, for that afternoon she had a telegram saying her son had met with a fatal accident at noon. It was exactly at noon that she had been struck the first time.

One of the most famous haunted Scottish churches is the ancient and picturesque Roslin chapel, situated about seven miles to the south of Edinburgh. In it, as in not a few other ancient churches, is a pillar, around which are festooned wreaths of stone work. It is named the "'Prentice Pillar," and a legend is

<sup>1</sup> See *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*, by Hugh Miller.  
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associated with it very similar to the legends associated with pillars or windows in several other British churches. It is this :<sup>1</sup> At the time of the building of the chapel the master-mason, who conceived the design, feeling his own unaided skill was unequal to the task of completing the pillar, took a journey to Rome, then no mean undertaking, to study more deeply the art and mysteries of sculpture.

While he was away, one of his apprentices, in the belief that it would be giving great pleasure to his master, conceived the idea of finishing the pillar.

He executed his task in a most masterly fashion. The pillar was such a perfect piece of workmanship that people flocked to the chapel to see it, and his fame spread far and wide, to such an extent that his master, on returning, found he was quite eclipsed by his pupil. This made him very jealous and, in a fit of fury, he murdered the young man, who, according to one version of the legend, cursed him with his dying breath and swore the stains of his blood would never be effaced from the spot where he fell.

There would seem to be a doubt as to the fate of his murderer ; while some writers declare he committed suicide, others affirm he was arrested, tried and executed, in the slow and very painful manner characteristic of so many executions in the Scotland of long ago.

Be that as it may, stains, said to be those of his blood, were long pointed out to gaping, awe-struck visitors on certain of the stones forming the floor of the chapel. His ghost, too, was believed to haunt the place, its favourite spot being the aforesaid pillar.

<sup>1</sup> See *Picturesque Scotland*, by Francis Watt, M.A., and the Rev. Andrew Carter, M.A.

Its white, bloodstained face used to appear from behind the pillar and peer, with large, troubled eyes, at people visiting the chapel, to their, doubtless, unmitigated terror.

But the phenomenon which has gained the chapel greatest notoriety is the ghostly illumination said, at one time, to appear only before the death of any descendant of William St. Clair, Prince of Orkney, Duke of Oldenburgh and founder of the chapel.

Despite, however, the fact that the last descendant died in 1778 and that the estate on which the chapel stands passed into the hands of the Erskines, Earls of Rosslyn, the ghostly illumination is declared still, periodically, to appear. According to many descriptions, it is ruddy, and resembles the glow caused by a great conflagration.

It has been portrayed in Harold's song in the Lay of the Last Minstrel thus :

O'er Roslin all that dreary night  
A wondrous blaze was seen to gleam ;  
'Twas broader than the watch-fire light,  
And redder than the bright moon-beam.

It glared on Roslin's castled rock,  
It ruddied all the copse-wood glen ;  
'Twas seen from Dryden's groves of oak,  
And seen from cavernd Hawthornden.

Seemed all on fire that chapel proud,  
Where Roslin's chiefs uncoffin'd lie ;  
Each baron, for a sable shroud,  
Sheathed in his iron panoply.

Seemed all on fire, within, around,  
Deep sacristy and altars pall ;  
Shone every pillar, foliage  
And glimmered all the dead men's mail.

Blazed battlement and pennet high,  
 Blazed every rose-carved buttress fair—  
 So still they blaze when fate is nigh  
 The lordly line of high St. Clair.

Thus wrote Sir Walter Scott many years ago.

Jedburgh Abbey appears to have suggested to Edgar Allan Poe the idea of his "Masque of the Red Death." There are many versions of the story of Yolande and the Masked Phantom at her bridal party, and this is one :<sup>1</sup> About the year 1270 an orphan boy, named Patrick Douglas, herded a few sheep on the hills belonging to the monks of Melrose. Some of the brotherhood, discovering him to be a very thoughtful, intelligent boy, took a special interest in him and taught him to read and write. They wanted him, in time, to wear the white cassock, narrow scapulary and plain linen hood of the Cistercian brethren, but Patrick had no wish to enter the Church and wanted, instead, to win laurels as a soldier. He, therefore, refused to take the monastic vow and went to the Court of King Philip of France, carrying with him letters of introduction from the kindly Lord Abbot and Prior of Melrose.

His bravery in battle won him honour and distinction and, on one occasion, he was invited as a guest to the palace of the illustrious Count of Dreux.

The Count had a daughter, named Jolande, or, as some style her, Joleta, who was so lovely that princes from all over the Continent came to court her, and troubadours sang of her in their songs.

Patrick fell madly in love with her the moment he saw her. At first, remembering his lowly birth,

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson's *Tales of the Scottish Borders*, Heywood's *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels*, Ingram's *Haunted Homes of Great Britain, Picturesque Scotland*, etc.

he hardly dare venture near her, but taking courage from the friendly look in her eyes when their gazes met, he waxed bolder, and, from merely exchanging a few words with her, went walking in the lovely castle grounds with her, breathing in her ears words of the most profound and soul-felt admiration. The fact that she did not object to his advances but seemed, on the other hand, to like and encourage them, gave him hope, and he was in the act of pouring forth his love to her one day when he was interrupted by the arrival of three commissioners from Scotland. They sought Jolande, in order to negotiate a marriage between her and Alexander III of Scotland.

Jolande had no other alternative than to consent, but, after the departure of the commissioners, she went into her boudoir and wept bitterly. She was fonder than she had realised of the brave but poor Patrick.

Seeing how hopeless his love for her was, Patrick left the castle at once and vanished, none knew or cared whither. In course of time the marriage of Alexander and Jolande took place in Jedburgh. The ceremony was performed in the abbey before Morel, the Lord Abbot, amid such grandeur and rejoicings as the town had never before witnessed. Afterwards a banquet, masque and grand ball took place in the adjoining castle.

The masque was arranged by the celebrated prophet, Thomas the Rhymer or, as he is also named, Thomas of Ercildoun, who, tradition asserts, was for three years prisoner of the Queen of the Fairies in the far-famed, haunted Eildons. The masque over, the dance began. It had not been long in progress before the dancers were startled to see, gliding about

in their midst, a tall, hooded skeleton. At first they thought it was one of the actors in the masque, but when they observed it more closely and recollect ed that none of the performers in the play had worn such a guise, they became alarmed, and their terror grew when it passed near them, accompanied by an icy wind and the horrible smell of decay.

Making straight for the royal bridal pair it extended to the king its bony hand. He shrank back in horror against a pillar where a torch-bearer stood, the queen shrieking and falling on the ground in a dead faint.

The music at once ceased, and the awe-stricken dancers stood staring, as if fascinated, at the hideous phantom which, confronting the king, shook its hand menacingly at him ; no sounds being heard save the rattling of its bones and chattering of its grinning teeth. The Lord Abbot, who had been as terrified as the rest, at length gathered courage and raising his crucifix was about to exorcise the phantom when, bending its grim head before him, it moved with long strides from the hall and vanished as mysteriously as it had come.

Its appearance was generally regarded as the portent of some approaching national calamity, and Thomas the Rhymer informed the Earl of March, in the presence of several other people, that the 16th of March would be "the stormiest day that ever was witnessed in Scotland." When the morning of the 16th dawned and was found to be fine and warm great ridicule was heaped on the prophet. Then, suddenly, came the news that the king was dead ; during the day he had been thrown from his horse, with fatal results.

"This is the storm I meant," Thomas said to his scoffers, "and there never was a tempest which will bring more ill-luck to Scotland."

He was, as history shows, right.

The mystery surrounding the skeleton at the dance was never solved. While some believed it was a spirit solely attached to royalty, others thought it was associated in some way with Patrick Douglas. Tradition asserts that the day after its appearance at the ball, Patrick took holy vows and became a monastic brother at Melrose ; and "though he spoke of Jolande in his dreams, he smiled, as if in secret triumph, when the phantom skeleton was mentioned in his hearing."

For long after these events both Jedburgh Abbey and castle acquired a reputation for being haunted, and rumour has it that at the former there may still be experienced, at times, especially in the autumn and winter, strange harrowing sounds and ghostly, unearthly manifestations.

## CHAPTER XXII

HAUNTED CHURCHES IN SCOTLAND  
*(continued)*

LONG before Burns immortalised the Auld Alloway Kirk in Ayrshire, it bore a reputation for being haunted. Here is a description of it from the pen of someone who visited it one winter night. "The moon, half hidden by clouds, poured its cold, white light on the waters of the Doon, the auld brig spanning it, and on the nearby ruins of Alloway Auld Kirk. And very grim and ghostly the ruins looked. The roof was gone, a tree, growing within the mouldering building, reared its leafless branches high above the walls. On either side the ruins were more trees, gaunt, naked trees, standing out dark and ominous against the glimmering background, their blackness in striking contrast to the tombstones that, whitened by the moonbeams, resembled so many winding sheets. A large night bird flying towards the old bell at one end of the kirk, and wailing dismally as it flapped its wings, gave an additional touch of eeriness to the scene. Indeed, as one gazed at the ruins, and sensed the extreme loneliness of the spot, one could understand how they inspired Burns to write his "Tam O' Shanter."

"Looking at the ruins, so grim and silent, deserted alike by the Christian living and the Christian dead, one might well see, as Tam saw, that terribly cold and gloomy night, through the few

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trees in at the open spaces which Time had made in the walls of the ruined building, the most horrible, unearthly revelry, the devil playing the pipes in one corner, in the shape of a beast, the coffins, standing like open presses, each corpse holding in its cold, bony fingers a lurid ghastly light, and dancing to the hellish music, each armed with a broomstick, Cuttiesark and her diabolical followers. And, with one's fancy thus stirred and stimulated, one might well hear Tam's loud roar of approval and see his mad flight on dear, faithful Maggie, pursued by the cursing, shrieking Nannie and her infernal crew of furies."

Thus wrote the individual who visited the ruins that particular winter night.

If he had gone one autumn night, some years later, and stood by Mrs. Alec Carter of Washington Heights, Manhattan, New York City, he might have seen, what she and her daughter told me they both saw.

It was no intuition or imagination on Burns's part that a child was once found murdered under one of the trees near the kirk, or that a woman committed suicide close to the same spot ; those were facts. It is a fact, too, that long after Burns's time, a tramp was found dead in the ruins, under circumstances strongly suggestive of foul play. As I have already said, the auld brig and kirk were rumoured to be haunted long before the writing of "Tam o' Shanter," and they gained an even more sinister and eerie reputation after the finding of the body of the tramp.

It was the hearing about these ghostly happenings that induced Mrs. Carter and her daughter to visit the ruins, in the hope that one of the ghosts alleged

to have their abode there would take it into its head to have a "peek" at them.

"We got there about midnight," Mrs. Carter said, "and were standing on the road between the Auld Bridge and the kirk when we heard a series of bumps, that sounded as if something big and heavy like a cask was being rolled along the ground. They were coming along the road towards us. It was a fine moonlight night, and when we walked past the slight curve in the road to a point commanding a more extensive view, we saw a black mist, I cannot describe it any more definitely, it was so shapeless and vague, slowly approaching us.

The bumping seemed to accompany it. My daughter, who won prizes at her school for running and is no mean swimmer and skater, what you call a champion all-round athlete, hitherto afraid of nothing, now clutched my arm and said : 'I guess that is the ghost. It's got me scared.' I was scared too but tried not to show it, for fear of scaring her more. The mist and bumping sounds drew nearer, and we shrank back against the trees as they passed right by us and went on in the direction of the ruins. The gateway of the kirk, which shone very white in the moonbeams, was shut, but we saw it open to let the mist through into the churchyard.

No visible agency opened that gate or closed it again as soon as the mist and bumping had entered. When this happened, we made for our car, which we had parked some little distance away, and drove to our hotel, without heed or thought of any speed limit."

Second sight is by no means an uncommon faculty in the Highlands and Western Isles of Scot-

land. Mr. Kenneth McNab, for many years commercial traveller for a big Glasgow firm of merchants, told me of a case of second sight he once came across in Argyll. He was enjoying a quiet, well-earned holiday there with his wife and two little children. One morning he was standing in a field at the back of the house in which he was lodging, watching some reapers plying their busy task. While he was thus occupied, a tall, rather good-looking young woman, with very beautiful red hair, entered the field and was walking towards one of the reapers, when a dog rushed at her, barking furiously. McNab feared it would bite her, but some of the other reapers drove it away, and it lay on the ground near them, shivering and whining. Struck with its odd behaviour he commented on it to a foreman, who was standing close beside him.

"Some dogs, like some people," the foreman replied, regarding McNab thoughtfully, "have second sight. They can see into the future. That dog is so gifted. It can see that girl with the red hair, her name is Mary Cameron, engaged in something it doesn't like at all, something that grievously affects its mistress, Nora McDougall, the girl to whom Mary is now talking. Poor Nora, and she so young and good and bonnie." He sighed deeply.

McNab eyed him curiously. "You speak as if she were going to die," he said. "Can you see into the future too ? "

"At times, yes," he answered slowly. "I can now."

He seemed to be looking at the two girls, but there was a strange, far-away expression in his blue eyes.

"I can see Nora and Mary in a churchyard.

They appear to be having a heated argument. They——” he stopped abruptly and shivered. After a brief pause he went on. “Nora is now lying on the grass, her head on the grave of old Elspeth Graham, who died two years ago of cancer. Her dog is crouching by her side, moaning. Oh, God, God!! That is what it saw coming to her. Nora is dead. Her spirit won’t rest till——” Another pause. Then, with an effort to appear calm, he was obviously deeply affected, “That is all.”

Not being a believer in “second sight,” and at the same time desirous to avoid wounding the man’s feelings by treating lightly what the man himself was evidently disposed to treat very seriously, McNab tactfully changed the subject.

Three days later a considerable sensation was created in the village by the discovery of Nora McDougall’s dead body in the local churchyard. Just as the foreman had said, her head was resting on the grave of an old woman named Elspeth Graham, and her dog, the dog that had barked so furiously at Mary Cameron, was crouching by her corpse, moaning and whining piteously. There were marks on her body suggestive of foul play. Grave suspicion attached itself to Mary Cameron. She was known to have been on very bad terms with Nora. A certain young man in the neighbourhood, with whom she had kept company for a time, had recently become engaged to Nora, and that was believed to be the chief bone of contention.

As nothing definite, however, could be proved against Mary, she was not arrested. After Nora’s mysterious death the churchyard acquired the reputation for being haunted, people declaring they

saw Nora’s ghost hovering around the spot where her body was found and perambulating the road leading to the church. Mary had been a regular attendant at the church before Nora’s death, but after it she never went to any of the services, and, so McNab was informed, seemed to studiously avoid going anywhere near the place. Whenever Nora’s dog saw her, it invariably started barking and growling angrily. One day Mary was found in a stream, drowned. How she got there no one could say, but on one of the banks of the stream, near where her body floated, were the imprints of a large dog’s paws. Mary had no dog. She hated dogs. Nora’s dog was large. It hated Mary.

After her death Nora’s ghost was seen no more.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## MORE SCOTTISH CHURCH HAUNTINGS

THE following curious story was told me some years ago by a curate, on his return from a visit to a clergyman in Glasgow. The clergyman's house was in the vicinity of Cathedral Street. One evening the curate returned from a long walk to find his host and hostess out. The maid informed him that they were calling on some friends who lived near the University. There was a light in the hall but not in the study, where he wanted to write a letter. While the maid ran to fetch some matches, he walked towards the fireplace, and was surprised to find the arm-chair nearest him occupied by an elderly man in clerical attire. The flickering fire-flames were sufficiently illuminating for him to see the old man's face. The features were very marked, the nose being large and Roman, and the eyebrows pent; but what arrested his attention most was a peculiar swelling about midway between the top of the forehead and the nose, which looked like a tumour. Placing himself in a chair opposite the one in which the old gentleman was sitting, the curate was about to address him when he suddenly vanished.

Imagining himself to have been the victim of an optical delusion, my informant stirred the dying embers into a blaze, threw himself back into his seat, and listened to the wind as it tore round the house with a rushing eerie sound. On the servant's

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returning with the matches he remarked on the wildness of the night.

"And this house is not a nice place to be in on such a night," the maid replied.

"Why so?" the curate queried.

"Well, sir," the maid said, her fingers fidgeting nervously, "it is rumoured to be haunted by an old man, the father of a clergyman who lived here many years ago. He fell dead one day on his way to church. They say he sometimes follows people to the church, but only before the death either of themselves or someone very closely related to them."

"And I know this is true because the cook who was here when I first came, she left soon after to be married, saw him following her one Sunday evening when she went to church. He not only followed her right up to the church, but he entered the church, and whenever she looked round she caught him peering at her from behind a pillar."

"She was terribly scared, and the very next day she received a telegram saying her mother had died in the night."

"I devoutly hope he won't follow me when I go to church on Sunday," the curate said. "What is the ghost like?"

"Promise me you won't say a word if I tell you, sir," the maid said. "The master doesn't like anyone to mention the queer things that sometimes happen here. It is a very sore subject both with him and madam."

"The ghost, sir, is an old gentleman, with what they call a Roman nose and a big lump on his forehead."

Another clerical friend of mine having heard the

vestry room of a certain church in Aberdeen was reputed to be haunted on All Hallow's E'en, obtained permission to spend a night in it, but only on condition he did not make his vigil public. The night arriving, he went to the church alone, and shortly before midnight was seated in the vestry before a small table, on which were a Bible, candle and matches. He sat in darkness, and for a long time nothing happened. It was nearly one o'clock when he suddenly became conscious of an unseen presence.

A cold shade seem to pass him. Gripped with fear he lit the candle. There was a gentle puff, and it was blown out. His terror grew, for he felt something bending over him, and sensed it was extremely grotesque. Still, he managed with an effort to pull himself sufficiently together to relight the candle. Again there was a gentle puff, and the flame was extinguished.

He stretched out his fingers for the matches, and the box was *put* into them, the act being accompanied by a soft chuckle. This was altogether too much for him. Springing to his feet, he groped his way in the dark to the door and got out of the church as quickly as he could under such conditions.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that such an ancient city as Dundee should have its ghosts. One was seen by a Canadian soldier, coming out of St. Mary the Virgin's church in the Nethergate.

It was just after the Great War. He had been serving for two years on the Western Front and was paying a brief visit to relatives in Dundee before going back to his home in Quebec.

Between midnight and one o'clock one night he was passing St. Mary's, when he saw a little

girl, carrying something in her arms, come out of the building. Wondering what she could be doing to be out alone at such an hour, he looked at her curiously. It was a fine night, and so light that the objects around him stood out almost as clearly as if it had been in the daytime. The girl had fair hair and pretty features, and wore a scarlet frock, with silver buttons that shone and sparkled in the moon-beams. The object she was carrying was a large wax doll.

Tripping daintily across the road, she walked a little way ahead of him, down several turnings, till she came to a church he did not know. He then saw her go right up to the door of it and suddenly vanish.

This happened three nights in succession, just about the same hour. He spoke about it to several people, but only one of them, an ex-policeman, seemed at all interested. "When I was on night duty near the cathedral," the retired policeman said, "I saw that girl several times, and I was told that in the house where she always went to from the cathedral, a little girl about her age had died, some twenty years ago, under very mysterious circumstances. She had a stepmother, and people living in the street thought the stepmother had something to do with her sudden death. Her doll and other toys were put in the coffin and buried with her. Maybe what you and I have seen was her ghost, but why it should come out of the cathedral beats me, unless she used to attend the cathedral in her lifetime. Possibly she was fond of music, some children and grown-ups are. There's no accounting for taste."

Scotland is famous for its cursers, seers and

prophets. One, who combined all three powers, was Dr. Smith of Campbeltown.<sup>1</sup> When he proposed to build a Highland church at Campbeltown, great resentment was shown against him by the heritors. One of them, a retired colonel, meeting him one day in the main street of the town, close to the Cross, raised his hand to strike him. "If you touch me," the doctor exclaimed, "you will never strike another blow." The colonel laughed mockingly and hit him, not very hard, on the chest. He expected the doctor would return the blow, when he would have thrashed him as he could easily have done, being the stronger of the two, but as the doctor did not strike him, he made some sneering remark about white feathers and walked away. Later that day he was taken suddenly very ill and in a short time died. Those who overheard what the doctor said to him now regarded the doctor with awe, as a curser and prophet.

His enemies became too afraid of his powers to do him any open injury, and suffered him to enter into negotiations with a local builder for the erection of his church. The builder being a Freemason wanted to lay the foundation stone in accordance with Masonic rules. To this the doctor, who was a typical narrow-minded Protestant of the old Scottish Church, would not agree. He looked upon all rites as Papist and declared he would have nothing popish about his intended church.

At this the master-builder flew into a rage and laid the stone in the name of the Devil; expressing a wish that the building should not be completed without great trouble and a serious calamity to the

<sup>1</sup> See *The White Wife*, by Cuthbert Bede.

doctor. The events that followed proved him to be as able a curser and sure a prophet as the doctor, for the church was hardly begun to be erected before the doctor was seized with a grievous complaint, from which he never recovered. Hardly had he been laid in his tomb before the walls of the church crashed down for want of a proper foundation.

When, after some months, they were rebuilt, the same thing happened from the same cause.

Other catastrophies followed. A great thunder-storm burst one night over the neighbourhood, flooding fields and houses. The church was struck by lightning, the spire was shattered, the windows destroyed, and the whole edifice so injured that it was many months before the damage could be repaired.

The builder who had pronounced the anathema on the church now expressed himself satisfied and said he would see no further mischief was done. What he did to remove his curse on the place no one ever knew, but certain it was that the church was completed without any further hindrance, and so beautiful it looked, with its strong and lofty spire, that it became the envy not only of all the towns in Kintyre but of towns farther afield.

A strange story came to me some years ago from Inverness. My informant, an undergraduate at one of the Scottish universities, who for convenience sake I will call Gale, made a compact one night with two of his friends, Ross and Davis, that the one of them who died first should appear to the others, within a week of his death, to let them know there was a future life. One evening, just two years later, Gale and Ross were walking past the cathedral of St. Andrews,

when a big black dog came out of the building, regarding them fixedly with its brown eyes, and walked ahead of them. They had intended going to the hotel where they were staying but they found themselves, instead, following the dog, which exercised a curious, all-compelling influence over them.

Down turning after turning they went, till finally they came to Tomnahurich, the hill of the fairies. Pausing before the entrance to the cemetery, the dog turned and regarding them again with a strange expression of wistfulness in its solemn dark eyes, it passed through the closed iron gate, into the moonlit, tomb-strewn space beyond.

"Well, I'm damned," Gale ejaculated. "What was it?"

"I'm blessed if I know," Ross replied. "It was something that shut and locked doors and gates could not deter, for it came out of the cathedral and went right in there," and he waved his hand in the direction of the gleaming tombstones, "as if nothing was in the way. I have always scoffed at ghosts, but if that dog wasn't a ghost, I'll, well, I'll eat my hat."

"Did you note the way it looked at us?" Gale said. "There was something uncannily human in its expression. You will scream at what I'm going to say."

"I know what you're going to say," Ross interrupted, "it reminded you of Davis. It did me too. They were Davis's eyes. I have sometimes caught Davis staring at me in that strangely intent manner. Now I come to think of it, I have not heard anything of him for some months."

"Nor I," Gale said. "I hope he is all right,

but there was something very ominous about that dog." They hastened back to their hotel, to learn a few days later that Davis was dead. He had died the very night and hour they had seen the phantom dog emerge from St. Andrew's cathedral.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## ISLE OF MAN GHOSTS

**A**S in the case of Scotland and other Gaelic or Celtic countries, the Isle of Man has its own peculiar and characteristic superphysical phenomena. One of them is the Glashtin or Glashan, a hairy little man phantom that haunts lonely spots, not infrequently old churchyards. A man, on his way to work early one morning, was passing Braddan church when he heard a loud chuckle, and looking round in alarm, for the sound was evil, he saw, seated on a tombstone, a little man with a hairy face, grinning malevolently at him. He knew at once it was a Glashtin and bowed three times to it; had he not done so, he would have had some serious misfortune before the day was over.<sup>1</sup>

In or near the same parish there was, and maybe still is, a Druidical Circle.<sup>2</sup> Two men who took stones from it to build a wall, met with misfortune directly afterwards. One was seized with gripping pains in one of his legs, the other with similar pains in one of his arms. Both were crippled for life.

About 1861, the churchwardens of Maughold thought fit to make an additional step up to the communion rails of the church. Hitherto there had been only one step, which was inconveniently—and in the case of elderly and infirm people—danger-

<sup>1</sup> From an MSS. lent me by Mrs. Maddock of Douglas.

<sup>2</sup> *Folk Lore of Isle of Man*, by A. W. Moore, M.A.

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ously high. They now decided to take away that step and, in its place, to have erected two shorter steps. In removing the offending step, the workmen discovered under it some human bones.<sup>1</sup> Whose they were and how they came there was a mystery.

Three men were engaged in the work, and while two went to some place in the village for their dinner, the third had his in the church. He was sitting by the exposed bones, alone in the building, devouring his repast, when he heard ghostly voices, whispering. Glancing fearfully around him, he saw nothing to account for the sounds, which were not confined to one spot but seemed to come from every part of the building.

He felt he was surrounded by invisible, inimical presences from another world.

His fear increased. He wanted to rush out of the place but could not move. His limbs were paralysed. He was utterly helpless.

The whispering circled round him. Was it in reality, or due merely to his imagination, that he felt cold, clammy fingers touch the back of his neck and cheeks? He opened his mouth to scream, but his voice died away in his throat and he could not utter a sound. He grew more and more frantic and was on the verge of madness when, to his infinite relief, the two other men returned.

It was not so bad now he had companions. They, too, heard the whispering and listened in mute awe and amazement. Then one of them spoke: "It's the bones," he said. "Let's bury them at once." And as soon as they had re-interred the bones, the whispering ceased.

<sup>1</sup> See *Folk Lore of Isle of Man*.

My same authority quotes a more recent case of haunting in connection with a church in a village, not named, to the south of Douglas, close to the Castletown Road. In this village an old Roman Catholic church was pulled down, and on its site a small house or cottage was built. It was either bought or rented by a married couple. The husband was engaged in work which necessitated his being out very late at night. Often he did not return home till the early hours of the morning. When this happened his wife used to hear the door of the room, in which she was sitting waiting for him, gently open. She was then conscious of a current of cold air, no matter how close and sultry the weather, and of many feet tramping past her right through the room, wall and all, into the next room. Great stillness followed for a while, to be broken by sounds of the many feet tramping by her again, out through her room door which, although shut, was now opened again by some unseen presence.

She was always so terrified that she ran into the street screaming and dared not enter the house till her husband came home. It was believed the haunting was due to the spirits of people who had once said Mass in the church that formerly stood on the site of the house.

But why they should haunt is a mystery.

Like Wales and certain of the English counties, the Isle of Man has its own peculiar dog phantoms.

The most ubiquitous and, consequently, widely known of these is the Moddey Dhoo or Black Dog ghost.

One of these for a long time haunted Peele Castle.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Waldron's *History of the Isle of Man*.

It used to come every night from the church and lie down by the fire in the guard-room. The soldiers who were on night duty in the castle lost much of their terror at seeing it so often in their midst, yet they were inspired by sufficient awe at its presence to refrain from swearing and using bad language.

None of them ever dared to remain in the room alone with it.

Every night at a certain hour, shortly before the Moddey Dhoo, or, as it is sometimes styled, the Manthe Doog, put in its appearance, the keys of the castle had to be delivered to the officer in charge of the guard.

As the soldiers were far too afraid of meeting the ghost dog to venture through the dark and silent church alone, two, sometimes three, of them took the keys to the officer.

On one occasion, a certain soldier sitting by the guard-room fire exclaimed, in a fit of drunken bravado, that he would go by himself with the keys. He said, with many oaths and profane language, that he was not afraid of dog or devil, and if the much dreaded Moddey Dhoo proved to be the latter, he would be very pleased to have an opportunity of introducing himself to His Satanic Majesty. His comrades tried to prevent him going but he would not listen to them, and, picking up the keys, he staggered off in the direction of the castle church. As the minutes went by and he did not come back, his comrades became very apprehensive and feared something dreadful had happened to him.

Suddenly, they heard cries for help and strange, unearthly sounds proceeding from the church.

They looked at one another aghast, and all were

too afraid to leave the fireside. Presently, they heard footsteps clattering along the stone floor leading to the church, and the adventurer returned, his face convulsed with terror. He tried to speak, to tell them what had happened, but he could not articulate a sound. He could only make signs ; and, falling down, he died, with distorted features, in violent agony.

After this the part of the church that was haunted by the Moddey Dhoo was bricked up, and the phantom dog was never seen again in the castle. "This event happened about three-score years since," says Waldron, "and I heard it attested by several, but especially by one old soldier who assured me he had seen it (*i.e.* the Manthe Doog) oftener than he had seen the hairs on his head."

A phantom peculiar to the Isle of Man and which does not appear to be seen or heard in any other country is the Keimagh. The descriptions of this spirit are mostly very vague, but all agree that it is chiefly to be encountered in caves and churchyards, and is very terrifying.

A Castletown tradesman sent two of his children, a boy and a girl, one afternoon, with a message to a relative living in a village a few miles away from the town.<sup>1</sup>

On their return, they had a strange tale to tell. They said that when they were passing a certain churchyard on their way home, they saw something sitting on a grave looking at them. It was so shadowy and indistinct they could not distinguish what exactly it was, but it was not a human being,

<sup>1</sup> This incident was told me, before the Great War, by Mrs. Edward Harper, a native of the Isle of Man.

of that they were quite certain, nor was it exactly an animal, certainly no animal species with which they were acquainted.

It was large, and black, and seemed to be squatting on its haunches.

Suddenly, it sprang up and leaping from tombstone to tombstone disappeared from view in the little wood adjoining the church.

Their father told them it must have been some silly fellow who had dressed up in order to frighten passers-by, but he knew very well it was the Keimagh that haunted that particular churchyard, for both he and his father had seen it, not once but several times. Its appearance had no special purpose unless it was merely to startle people, and that would seem to be the case with many, perhaps the majority of ghostly phenomena ; so far as we can judge, they are purposeless, though, possibly, they are sent by the major powers behind the scenes just to let us know there is a superphysical world, at times in very close proximity to this material world.

A terrific Manx phantom is the Buggane, a species of very evil elemental.

A tradition of a Buggane haunting is associated with the church of St. Trinian.

It is said that, while this church was in the course of construction, its roofs were constantly thrown down by a Buggane that accompanied its mischievous acts with peals of diabolical laughter. A certain tailor, named Timothy, declared he was so little afraid of the dreaded phantom that he would sit in the church chancel one day and complete a pair of breeches he was making. The eventful day arriving, in fulfilment of his boast, Timothy went to the church and,

seating himself in the chancel, commenced to sew.

It was not long before a frightful head slowly arose through the floor of the chancel. As its pale eyes focussed on Timothy, they glittered evilly.

Timothy froze, and it required all his will-power to go on stitching.

Next a body, as grotesque and hideous as the head, came into view.

Still Timothy went on stitching, but when the Buggane's legs appeared and it moved towards him, its long spidery arms raised menacingly above its head, he yielded to terror, and springing to his feet fled out of the building. As he did so the roof of the church crashed to the ground and the Buggane, chuckling with hellish glee, came bounding after him ; nor did it cease its pursuit until he reached a consecrated piece of ground when, with a scream of baffled fury, it went bounding back to the church. Timothy never took his sewing to the church again, and, so says tradition, the church continued to be, for a long period at any rate, roofless. It is now in ruins.

The ruins of Rushen Abbey were once believed to be haunted by a Phynnodderee, or kind of goblin, perhaps without any very similar counterpart in Great Britain or Ireland. One is said to have been seen one night at Rushen Abbey, digging furiously, as if in search of something, and, odd to relate, when the soil was examined directly after it had vanished, no sign of any excavation was visible.

A more ordinary phantom was seen, on one occasion, in a church in Douglas.

My informant, a Mrs. Bishop of London, while on

a visit to friends in Douglas, went one week-day morning to the church, which she used to attend regularly when a resident in the town some twenty years previously. She was wandering about the building, experiencing great joy in seeing a place that brought back such pleasant memories to her, when a gentleman approached her, and, in a whisper, said : "It is many years since we last met, Mrs. Bishop."

At first Mrs. Bishop did not recall him, and then, suddenly, she knew who it was : "Why, it's Mr. Brown !"<sup>1</sup> she ejaculated. "I can't tell you how glad and relieved I am see to you. You were always so very kind to me and my husband. It gave us both a terrible shock to read about your death in the papers. How could they make such a mistake ?"

"It was no mistake," Mr. Brown said, with his usual genial smile. "I am dead," and Mrs. Bishop found herself gazing into empty space.

<sup>1</sup> A fictitious name by special request.

## CHAPTER XXV

## AMERICAN HAUNTED CHURCHES

THE following extract from a letter written by a lady to Mr. Richard Hodgson, Secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research, appeared in the Journal of the Society :<sup>1</sup>

The following winter I was in New Orleans and went one Sunday, with my sister, to Trinity church, to hear Dr. (now Bishop) Hugh Miller Thompson. The church being crowded, a single row of seats had been placed in the aisle next the windows. My sister took a chair just behind mine, the one in front of me being vacant. During the Litany, at the clause "from sudden death," a hand was laid on my prayer book. It was a large, well-shaped, white hand, evidently a man's, with nails well cared for. This I took in at a glance, and before I had time to speculate on the subject, it was gone. I questioned my sister but she had seen nothing. The aisle was too broad for anyone to reach across, and no one had passed down the aisle after the service had begun ; so it could not have been human.

The writer of the letter informed Mr. Hodgson later that she did not know the hand, and said that there was no connection between it and a previous experience she had had when visiting a friend in the country. She had then seen a figure in black, its face hidden by a heavy veil.

It came to her bed, and she was so frightened that she hid under the clothes and shook her friend, whispering to her that someone was in the room.

<sup>1</sup> See vol. i., April 1888.

When her friend awoke the figure had gone. It was bright moonlight at the time. In the house were only herself, a doctor and his wife, and her friend. The room was large and brilliantly illuminated with moonlight, which poured in through several windows. If anyone had been trying to hide she could have seen them.

In the same volume, Mr. Hodgson published some correspondence he had from a Mr. Gideon Haynes. The following is an extract from a letter, dated 25th June 1887 :

" I received a message from the wife of one of our convicts in prison for life that their only child, a bright little boy of five years old, was dead, he having accidentally fallen into the water and been drowned. I was requested to communicate to the father the death of the child but not the cause, as the wife preferred to tell him herself, when she should visit him a week or two later. I sent for him to the guard-room and, after a few questions in regard to himself, I said I had some sad news for him.

" He quietly replied, ' I know what it is, Mr. Warden, my boy is dead.'

" ' How did you hear of it ? ' I asked.

" ' Oh, I knew it was so ; he was drowned, was he not, Mr. Warden ? '

" ' But who informed you,' I again asked.

" ' No one,' he replied.

" ' How then did you know he was and what makes you think he was drowned ? '

" ' Last Sunday,' he said, ' your little boy was in the chapel ; he fell fast asleep, and you took him up and held him. As I looked up and caught sight of him lying in your arms, instantly the thought occurred

to me that my boy was dead and drowned. In vain I tried to banish it from my mind, to think of something else, but could not ; the tears came into my eyes, and it has been ringing in my ears ever since ; and when you sent for me my heart sank within me, for I felt sure my fears were to be confirmed.'

"What made it more remarkable was the fact that the child was missed during the forenoon of that Sunday, but the body was not found for some days later. The foregoing is copied from my journal, the entry was made on the day of the interview, and I can assure you it is strictly correct in every particular."

In a subsequent letter Mr. Haynes says the convict's name was Timothy Cronan. He got a life sentence, in or about the year 1862, for an assault on a woman, but was pardoned and let out of prison in 1873, conditionally that he went to his sister in California. During the time he was in prison his wife used to visit him with their child, to which he was greatly attached. He always held it in his arms.

When I was broadcasting in Radio City, New York, in 1934, a lady who was in one of the casts with me told me of an incident that occurred some years previously in a church in Manhattan.

She and a friend, a Mrs. James of Boston, were alone in the church one week-day morning, when they heard someone in high heels running up the centre aisle towards where they were standing. It was a fine day and the church was full of sunlight, still they could see no one, nothing to account for the sounds. The steps stopped in front of them and Mrs. James screamed. "It's all right, Daisy,"

my informant, who was badly scared herself, exclaimed, "it won't hurt you."

"It touched me on the face," Mrs. James gasped ; she was deathly pale and trembling all over. "I could feel an icy hand on my cheek." Just as she finished speaking they heard the footsteps again, this time going down the aisle, away from them. Presently the door of the church slammed violently, after which there was silence. "The thing, whatever it was, has gone," my informant remarked. "Did you smell anything ? I fancied I did."

"What ?" Mrs. James queried.

"A queer seashore smell."

"I smelt it most distinctly," Mrs. James said. "Ozone, the smell of the sea. You can't mistake it. I felt I was in the presence of something from out of the sea, something wet and covered with seaweed."

That night she received news of May, her favourite sister's death. May had been drowned when bathing in or near Atlantic City, exactly at the time they had heard the running footsteps in the church aisle.

Within an easy walking distance of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, among the Berkshire Hills, there is a valley locally styled the Wizard's Den. In this valley there is a cave, traditionally said to have once been an Indian temple. In it stood an altar, on which human sacrifices were made to the Devil-God, Hobomocko, and his hellish followers. When the early white settlers drove the Indians out of the valley, they are said to have built a wooden church on a site in such close proximity to the cave that it could be used as a kind of vestry room. So frightful,

however, were the sights and sounds experienced by the clergy and congregation in and around the church that it had to be abandoned. Deserted and shunned by all, even in the daytime, it soon fell into a state of dilapidation, and in course of time entirely ceased to exist. To-day there is only the cave to indicate where it once stood, but, according to rumour and local gossip, tombstones, with the names of the early settlers crudely carved on them, have from time to time been unearthed in the piece of ground that in all probability formed the churchyard.

Many are the stories of weird and ghostly happenings in the cave and valley. This is one of them :<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the church had been abandoned, John Chamberlain of Dalton was hunting deer one day in the valley when he was overtaken by a storm. It was so terrible that he was forced to seek shelter in the church. The wooden walls and roof creaked and swayed so much with every gust of wind that, fearing the building would fall about his ears, he went into the cave.

All was very still and dark within it. With the aid of his tinder-box he lit a fire composed of fragments of wood, of which, fortunately, there was an abundance.

After partaking of some of the food he had in his knapsack, he sat crouching over the fire, and presently, overcome with weariness, he lay down and fell asleep. He awoke to hear footsteps, and on sitting up saw stealing into the cave, one by one, shadowy figures something like Indians, and yet not exactly Indians, for they had tails and cloven feet.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to it is made in *Myths and Legends of our own Land*, by Chas. M. Skinner.

Obeying a sign from the tallest of them, who had a terrifying face, more like that of some strange, ferocious animal than a human being, the figures assembled in front of a great stone which Chamberlain had not noticed before.

It stood at the far end of the cave and was covered with red stains, unpleasantly suggestive of blood. In obedience to another signal from the leader, one of the phantoms, with scalps dangling round its waist, leaped on to the stone and began a weird incantation. After it had gone on for some minutes some more phantoms entered the cave, dragging with them a girl.

They flung her, shrieking, on to the stone. A fearful old hag then came forward, and raising a glittering axe appeared to await a signal from the leader to bring it down on the writhing victim, who cast a despairing glance at Chamberlain. Full of pity and indignation he crossed himself, crying out as he did so : "In the name of God don't dare touch her." Instantly there was a terrific peal of thunder, a flash of forked lightning illuminated the whole cave with a lurid blue light, and demons, girl and altar vanished. Chamberlain had had quite enough of the cave, he got out of it as quickly as possible.

The following is quite a different version of the haunting.

One summer evening, during the last century, a Californian rancher entered the valley in search of the cave and old cemetery. He was a disbeliever in the superphysical. Hearing the valley was reputed to be haunted, he had come there to test the truth of the rumours, his only companion being his favourite

dog. The valley was so wild and gloomy that he kept his hand on his revolver, in case he might be attacked by some evilly disposed person or people.

He was close to an open space when his dog growled. Glancing apprehensively around he saw no one; and then, suddenly, something very remarkable happened. Where there had been nothing but empty space a second or so before, was now a church.

Composed of wood, it was in a state bordering on ruin. There were holes in the roof, ivy and other creepers grew on its walls, and its large, iron bell was caked with rust. Impelled by a power he could not resist the rancher pushed open a crazy old door, which groaned ominously on its hinges as it swung creaking back, and entered the building.

There were several rows of old-fashioned high-back pews on either side the centre aisle, and though he could see no one in them, he got the impression they were filled and that he was being scrutinised by many curious eyes. As he walked through the building, his feet clattering on the stone floor awoke echoes which went on reverberating as if they would never cease. Led on by the same all-compelling invisible influence he entered a cave, in which stood a common deal table, several chairs and a large coffin. In one corner of the cave was a fire of logs. Its red glow, furnishing the sole light, cast strange shadows on the floor, walls and roof of the cave.

Tired with his long tramp, the rancher sank into an arm-chair by the fire, and his faithful dog crouched on the ground by his side.

Gradually his eyelids closed and he sank into a deep sleep. He was awakened by a clangling

sound. It came from the adjoining church, and he suddenly realised it was the church bell pealing dolefully as if for a funeral. Hardly had its echoes died away when his dog, which had been lying very still, uttered a low, prolonged growl.

The rancher then heard a creaking, and looking in the direction of the noise he saw the lid of the coffin slowly rise.

Higher and higher it lifted up until he saw beneath it something luminous that might have been a face, but it was too vague and filmy for him to say with any degree of certainty what it was.

As more and more of it came into view, with the continued elevating of the lid, he heard sounds, which he was destined never to forget, they were so horrible.

Beginning with a rustle, like a rustling of the wind through the leaves of a tree, they developed into a series of hideous gurgles. Then, as these sounds died away there appeared, in the place of the luminous something, the shadowy form of a man in a long dark cloak and very high boots. It was not the man's clothes, however, but the face that riveted the rancher's attention. Running diagonally across the forehead and left cheek, from one side of the face to the other, was a streak of crimson, unmistakably the result of a dreadful wound, that afforded a startling contrast to the rest of the face, which was of marble whiteness. As the phantom gazed appealingly at him, the rancher saw that something resembling a pitch-plaster covered its mouth, a discovery that gave him a fresh thrill of terror but little surprised him, since the gurgling sounds had suggested as much. Instead of growling,

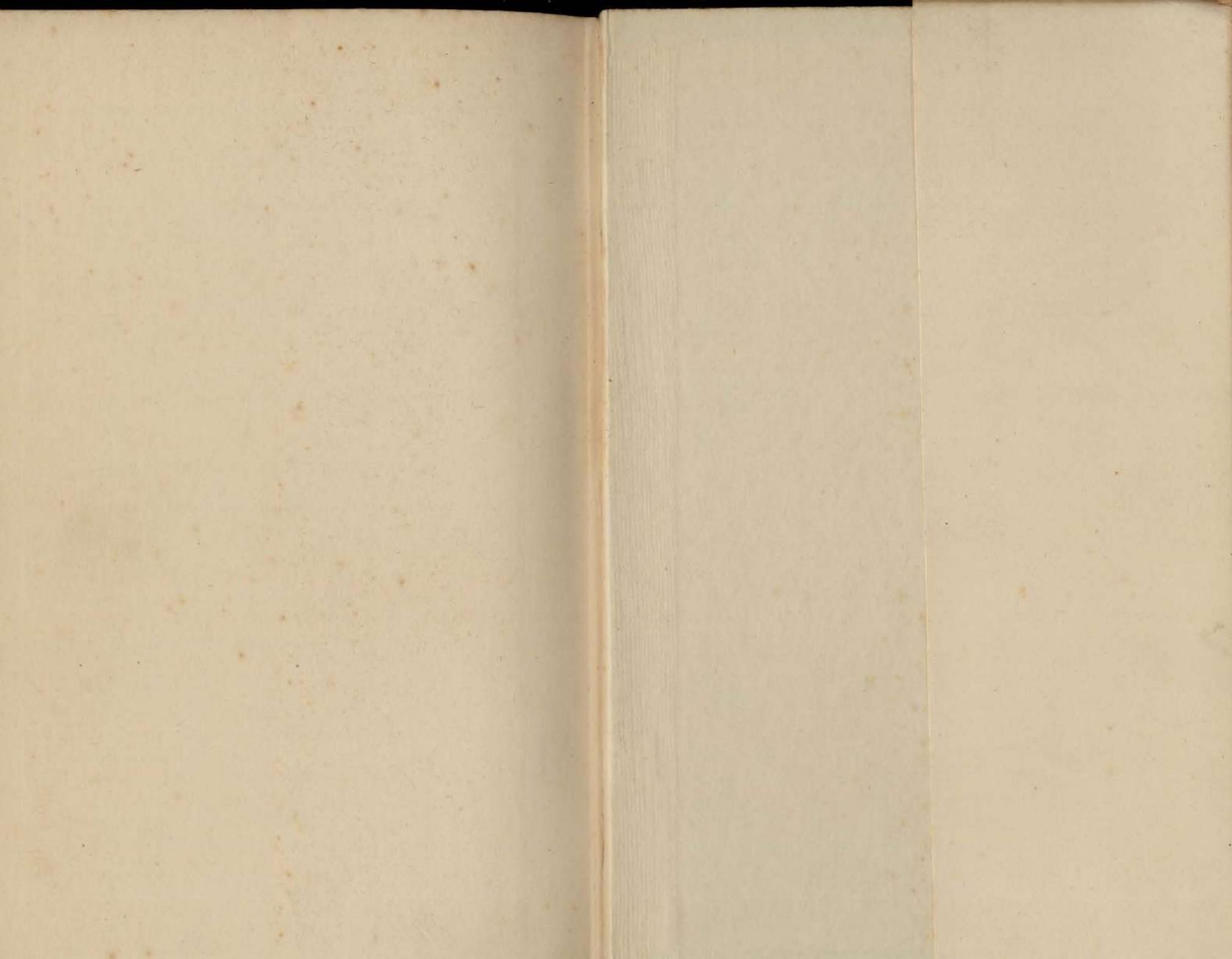
his dog was now crouching as close as possible against him, uttering low moans and shaking all over. Hitherto, the rancher had been too paralysed with terror to move. Now, however, having succeeded in pulling himself together, he approached the figure and passed through it, becoming conscious, as he did so, of a something that was impalpable but which gave him the impression of coldness, a coldness that was the icy coldness of death. A shock like that caused by contact with an electric battery ran through him, throwing him off his balance, and he had to clutch hold of a piece of furniture to prevent himself falling. He saw the figure which had been dispersed, when he passed through it, reform. Every particle of it seemed to be in a state of violent vibration, while it kept on emitting, at intervals, spasmodic breathing that was indescribably appalling. By the exertion of tremendous will-power the rancher sufficiently overcame his terror to speak.

"Who or what are you?" he asked. The breathing sounds at once ceased, but there was no reply. "If you are not at rest, what is it that you want?" was his next question, and there was a hissing, gurgling sound, as if the figure were trying to say something but could not, owing to the thing over its mouth. "Can't you, won't you speak?" the rancher continued, whereupon the face of the figure became horribly convulsed, as if it were making even more desperate efforts to articulate. The same ghastly gurgling accompanied these efforts, and the sounds, after reaching a climax, ended in something like a low moaning cry of despair. With a profound gesture, the figure then raised a small hand, as white and delicate as a woman's, to its mouth and the

next moment vanished. Almost simultaneously the rancher's dog got up, shook itself and exhibited signs of the greatest joy and relief. Though not displayed in so buoyant a fashion these sentiments were shared by the rancher, who, convinced now in the reality of the superphysical and feeling that he had quite enough experience of it for one night, made for the entrance of the cave, to discover, on reaching it, a moonlit, empty clearing beyond. Of the old wooden church there was not a vestige.

By way of contrast to the foregoing somewhat grim adventure, the following story was told me by a Harvard graduate after a talk by me on ghosts, in the house of a lady well known in Baltimore society.

"A lady and gentleman, friends of mine," he said, "were visiting an old church in Boston one week-day morning. The lady was looking at a tablet on one of the walls when she heard footsteps behind her, and someone puffed on her cheek. Supposing it to be her husband she said: 'Alfred, I wish you would not do that. Your inside must be out of order, for your breath is none too pleasant, what you need is some medicine.' As there was no reply, she turned round and saw not Alfred but a grinning death's head."



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